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Adventure

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Talbot Mundy
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Douglas Oliver
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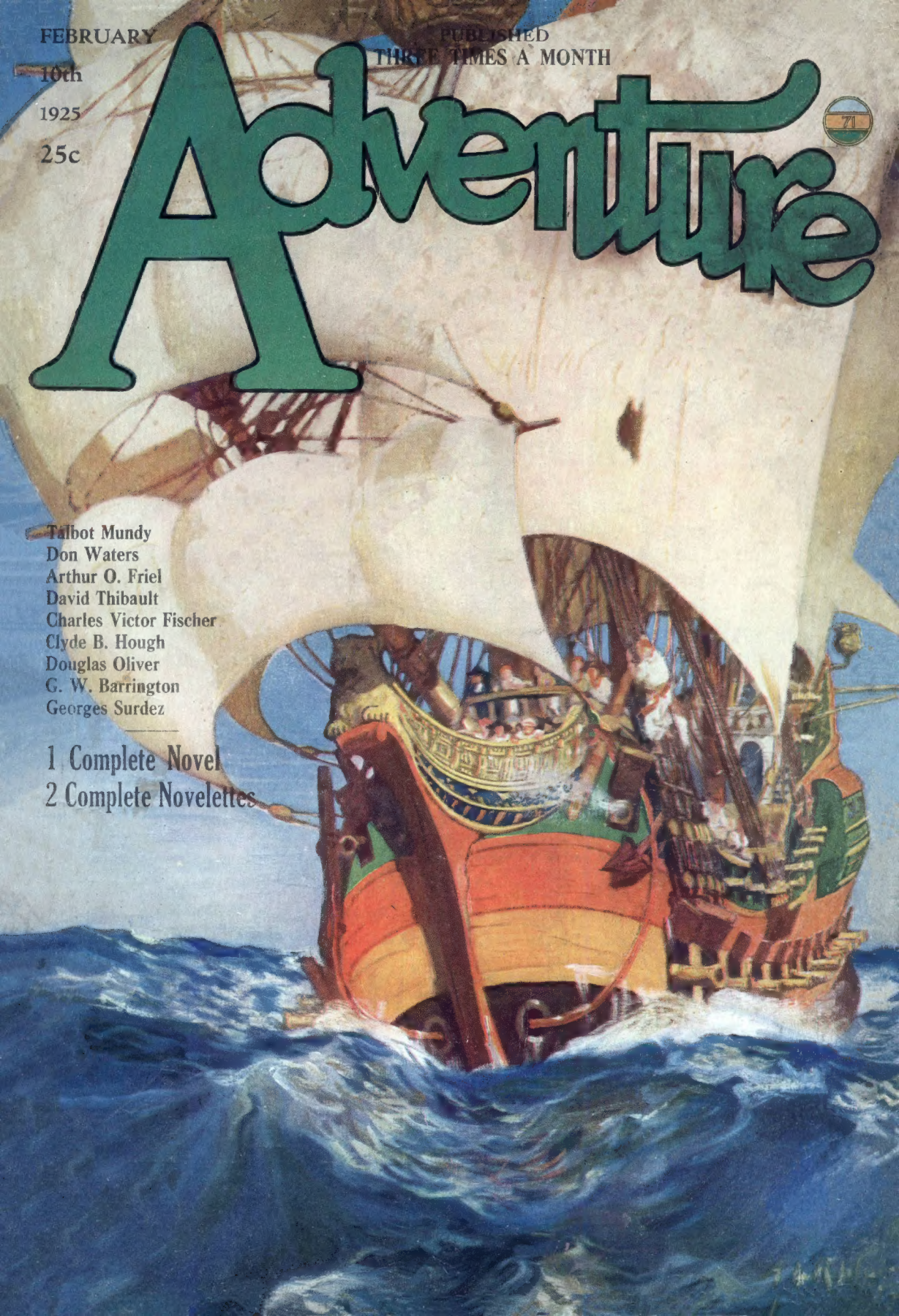
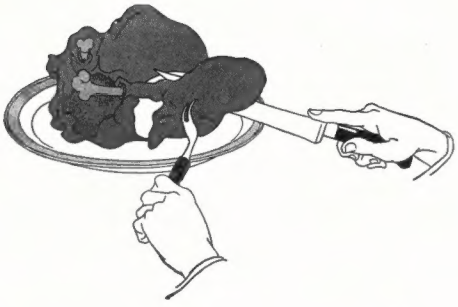
Georges Surdez

1 Complete Novel
2 Complete Novelettes





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**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

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One Complete Novel and Two Complete Novelettes

CLIFF CROCKER'S father wanted to keep him out of the war, and succeeded in making of him "THE INCOMPLETE MARINER." This complete novel of the sea, by Leonard H. Nason, is in the next issue.

HIS zeal made him blind to the strange, savage Africa which had engulfed him, and he tried to meddle with things he did not understand. "THE FLAME" is a complete novelette by L. Patrick Greene, in the next issue.

WHEN the boycotted pirate, *Halsey*, sent *Roger's* right ear to the buccaneer, *"Long Tom" Davis*, with a demand for *Roger's* ransom it was too much, and *Davis* set sail to wipe out *Halsey's* nest. "THIEVES' HONOR" is a novelette of the Spanish Main, by J. Allan Dunn, complete in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

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Adventure
Feb. 10th 1925
Vol. LI No. 1

TROS of SAMOTHRACE

A Complete Novel by Talbot Mundy

Author of "Om," "Mohamed's Tooth," etc.

CHAPTER I

THE LATE SUMMER OF B. C. 55

TOWARD sunset of a golden summer evening in a clearing in a dense oak forest five men and a woman sat beside a huge flat rock that lay half buried in the earth and tilted at an angle toward where the North Star would presently appear.

At the southern end of the clearing was a large house built of mud and wattle with a heavy thatched roof; it was surrounded by a fence of untrimmed branches, and within the enclosure there were about a dozen men and women attending a fire in the open air, cooking, and carrying water.

Across the clearing from a lane that led between enormous oaks, some cattle, driven by a few armed men clothed in little other than skins dawdled along a winding cowpath toward the opening in the fence. There was a smell of wood smoke and a hush that was entirely separate from the noise made by the catttle, the soft sigh of wind in the trees, the evensong of birds and the sound of voices. Expectancy was in the air.

The five men who sat by the rock were talking with interruptions, two of them being foreigners, who used one of the dialects of southern Gaul; and that was intelligible to one of the Britons who was a druid, and to the woman, who seemed to understand it perfectly, but not to the other men, to

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whom the druid had to keep interpreting.

"Speak slowly, Tros, speak slowly," urged the druid; but the big man—although he spoke the Gaulish perfectly—had a way of pounding his left palm with his right fist and interjecting Greek phrases for added emphasis, making his meaning even more incomprehensible.

He looked a giant compared to the others although he was not much taller than they; and his clothing was magnificent, but considerably travel stained. His black hair, hanging nearly to his shoulders, was bound by a heavy gold band across his forehead. A cloak of purple cloth embroidered around the edges with gold thread partly concealed a yellow tunic edged with gold and purple.

He wore a long sword with a purple scabbard, suspended from a leather belt that was heavily adorned with golden studs. His forearm was a Titan's and the muscles on his calves were like the roots of trees; but it was his face that held attention:

Force, under control and with immense stores in reserve; youth unconquerable, yet peculiarly aged before its time; cunning of the sort that is entirely separate from cowardice; imagination undivorced from concrete fact; an iron will and great good humor, that looked capable of blazing into wrath—all were written in the contours of forehead, nose and jaw. His leonine, amberous eyes contained a hint of red, and the breadth between them accentuated the massive strength of the forehead; they were eyes that seemed afraid of nothing, and incredulous of much; not intolerant, but certainly not easy to persuade.

His jaw had been shaved recently, to permit attention to a wound that had now nearly healed, leaving a deep indentation in the chin, and the black re-growing beard, silky in texture, so darkened the bronze skin that except for his size, he might almost have passed for an Iberian or a Roman.

"Conops will tell you," he said, laying a huge hand on the shoulder of the man beside him, "how well I know this Caius Julius Cæsar. Conops, too, has had a taste of him: I have seen Cæsar's butchery. I know how he behaves to druids and to kings and to women and to all who oppose him, if he once has power. To obtain power—hah!—he pretends sometimes to be magnanimous. To keep it——"

Tros made a gesture with his right fist, showed his teeth in a grin of disgust and turned to the other Samothracian beside him.

"Is he or is he not cruel, Conops? Does he keep Rome's promises. Are Rome's or his worth that?"

He snapped his fingers.

Conops grinned and laid a forefinger on the place where his right eye had been. Conops was a short man, of about the same age as Tros, possibly five-and-twenty, and of the same swarthy complexion; but he bore no other resemblance to his big companion. One bright-blue eye peered out from an impudent face, crowned with a knotted red kerchief. His nose was upturned, as if it had been smashed in childhood. He had small brass earrings, similar in pattern to the heavy golden ones that Tros wore, and he was dressed in a smock of faded Tyrian blue, with a long knife tucked into a red sash at his waist. His thin, strong, bare legs looked as active as a cat's.

"Cæsar is as cruel as a fish!" he answered, nodding. "And he lies worse than a longshore Alexandrian with a female slave for hire."

The druid had to interpret that remark, speaking in soft undertones from a habit of having his way without much argument. He was a broad-faced young man with a musical voice, a quiet smile and big brown eyes, dressed in a blue-dyed woolen robe that reached nearly to his heels—one of the bardic druids of the second rank .

It was the woman who spoke next, interrupting the druid's explanation, with her eyes on Tros. She seemed to gloat over his strength and yet to be more than half-suspicious of him, holding her husband by the arm and resting chin and elbow on her knee as she leaned forward to watch the big man's face. She was dressed in a marvelously worked tunic of soft leather, whose pricked-in, barbaric pattern had been stained with blue woad. Chestnut hair, beautifully cared for, hung to her waist; her brown eyes were as eager as a dog's; and though she was young and comely, and had not yet borne a child, she looked too pantherlike to be attractive to a man who had known gentler women.

"You say he is cruel, this Cæsar; is that because he punished you for disobedience—or did you steal his woman?" she demanded.

Tros laughed—a heavy, scornful laugh from deep down near his stomach.

"No need to steal! Caius Julius Cæsar *gives* women away when he has amused himself," he answered. "He cares for none unless some other man desires her; and when he has spoiled her, he uses her as a reward for his lieutenants. On the march his soldiers cry out to the rulers of the towns to hide their wives away, saying they bring the maker of cuckolds with them. Such is Cæsar; a self-worshipper, a brainy rascal, the meanest cynic and the boldest thief alive. But he is lucky as well as clever, have no doubt of that."

The druid interpreted, while the woman kept her eyes on Tros.

"Is he handsomer than you? Are you jealous of him? Did he steal *your* wife?" she asked; and Tros laughed again, meeting the woman's gaze with a calmness that seemed to irritate her.

"I have no wife, and no wife ever had me," he answered. "When I meet the woman who can turn my head, my heart shall be the judge of her, Gwenhwyfar."

"Are you a druid? Are you a priest of some sort?" the woman asked, her glowing eyes examining the pattern of the gold embroidery that edged his cloak.

Tros smiled and looked straight at the druid instead of at her. Conops drew in his breath, as if he was aware of danger.

"He is from Samothrace," the druid remarked. "You do not know what that means, Gwenhwyfar. It is a mystery."

THE woman looked dissatisfied and rather scornful, but lapsed into silence, laying both elbows on her knees now and her chin in both hands to stare at Tros even more intently. She seemed to be trying to see through him, resenting his presence and his words, yet fascinated. Her husband took up the conversation. He was a middle-sized active looking man with a long mustache, dressed in wolf-skin with the fur side outward over breeches and a smock of knitted wool.

An amber necklace and a beautifully worked gold bracelet on his right wrist signified chieftainship of some sort, and he carried his head with an air of authority that was increased by the care with which his reddish hair had been arranged to fall over his shoulders; but though he looked bold enough there was a suggestion of cunning and of weakness and cupidity at the corners of his eyes and mouth. The skin of his body had been stained blue, and the color had faded until the natural weathered white showed through it, and the resulting blend was barbarously beautiful.

"The Romans who come to our shore now and then have things they like to trade with us for other things that we can easily supply. They are not good traders. We have much the best of it," he remarked.

Tros understood him without the druid's aid, laughed and thumped his right fist on his knee; but instead of speaking he paused and signed to them all to listen. There came one long howl, and then a wolf-pack chorus from the forest.

"This wolf smelt, and that wolf saw; then came the pack! What if ye let down the fence?" he said then. "It is good that ye have a sea around this island. For I tell you, the wolves of the Tiber are less merciful than those, and more in number and more ingenious and more rapacious. *Those* wolves glut themselves; they steal a cow, maybe, but when they have a bellyful they go; and a full wolf falls prey to the hunter. But where Romans gain a foothold they remain, and there is no end to their devouring. I saw Cæsar cut off the right hands of fifty thousand Gauls because they disobeyed him."

"Perhaps they broke a promise," said the woman, tossing her head to throw the hair out of her eyes. "Commius the Gaul, whom Cæsar sent to talk with us, says the Romans bring peace and affluence and that they keep *their* promises."

"Affluence for *Commius*, aye, and for the Romans!" Tros answered. "Cæsar made Commius king of the Atrebates. But do you know what happened to the Atrebates first? How many men were crucified? How many women sold into slavery? How many girls dishonored? Aye, there is always peace where Rome keeps wolf's promises, and those are the only sort she ever keeps! Commius is king of a tribe that has no fighting men nor virgins, and that toils from dawn to dark to pay the tribute money that Cæsar shall send to Rome—and for what? To bribe the Roman senators! And why? Because he plans to make himself the ruler of the world!"

"But how do you know?" asked the woman, when the druid began to interpret that long speech. She motioned to the druid to be still—her ear was growing more

accustomed to the Samothracian's strange pronunciation.

Tros paused, frowning, grinding his teeth with a forward movement of his iron jaw. Then he spoke, looking straight at the woman:

"I am from the isle of Samothrace, that never had a king, nor ever bowed to foreign yoke. My father is a prince of Samothrace, and *he* understands what that means." He glanced at the druid. "My father had a ship—a good ship, well manned with a crew of freemen—small, because there are no harbors in the isle of Samothrace and we must beach our ships, but seaworthy and built of Euxine timber, with fastenings of bronze. We had a purple sail; and that, the Romans said, was insolence.

"The Keepers of the Mysteries of Samothrace despatched my father in his ship to many lands, of which Gaul was one, for purposes which druids understand. Cæsar hates druids because, as *he* claims, he is a high priest of a Roman temple and descended from the Roman Venus Genetrix, but in truth because the druids have secrets that they keep from him.

"He denounced my father as a pirate, although Pompey, the other tribune, who made war on pirates, paid my father homage and gave him a parchment with the Roman safe-conduct written on it. My name, as my father's son, was also on the parchment, as were the names of every member of the crew. I was second in command of that good ship. Conops was one of the crew; we two and my father are all who are left."

Tros paused, met Conops' one bright eye, nodded reminiscently, and waited while the druid translated what he had just said into the British tongue. The druid spoke carefully, avoiding more reference to the Mysteries than he could help. But the woman hardly listened to him; she had understood.

"Our business was wholly peaceful," Tros continued. "We carried succor to to the Gauls, not in the form of weapons or appliances, but in the form of secret counsel to the druids whom Cæsar persecuted, giving them encouragement, advising them to bide their time and to depend on such resources as were no business of Cæsar's.

"And first, because Cæsar mistrusted us, he made us give up our weapons. Soon after, on a pretext, he sent for that parchment that Pompey had given my father; and he failed to return it. Then he sent men to burn our ship, for the sake of the bronze that was in her; and the excuse he gave was that our purple sail was a defiance of the Roman Eagles. Thereafter he made us all prisoners; and at that time Conops had two eyes."

Gwenhwyfar glanced sharply at Conops, made a half-contemptuous movement of her lips and threw the hair back on her shoulders.

"All of the crew, except myself and Conops, were flogged to death by Cæsar's orders in my father's presence," Tros went on. "They were accused of being spies. Cæsar himself affects to take no pleasure in such scenes, and he stayed in his tent until the cruelty was over. Nor did I witness it, for I also was in Cæsar's tent, he questioning me as to my father's secrets.

"But I pretended to know nothing of them. And Conops did not see the flogging, because they had put his eye out, by Cæsar's order, for a punishment, and for the time being they had forgotten him. When the last man was dead, my father was brought before Cæsar and the two beheld each other face to face, my father standing and Cæsar seated with his scarlet cloak over his shoulders, smiling with mean lips that look more cruel than a wolf's except when he is smiling at a compliment or flattering a woman. And because my father knows all these coasts, and Cæsar does not know them but, nevertheless, intends to invade this island——"

The druid interrupted.

"How does he know it is an island?" he asked. "Very few, except we and some of the chiefs, know that."

"My father, who has sailed around it, told him so in an unguarded moment."

"He should not have told," said the druid.

"True, he should not have told," Tros agreed. "But there were those who told Cæsar that Britain is a vast continent, rich in pearls and precious stones; he plans to get enough pearls to make a breastplate for the statue of the Venus Genetrix in Rome.

"So my father, hoping to discourage him, said that Britain is only an island, of no wealth at all, inhabited by useless people, whose women are ugly and whose men are for the most part deformed from starvation

and sickness. But Cæsar did not believe him, having other information and being ambitious to possess pearls."

"We *have* pearls," said the woman, tossing her head again, pulling down the front of her garment to show a big pearl at her breast.

The druid frowned.

"Speak on, Tros. You were in the tent. Your father stood and confronted Cæsar. What then?"

"Cæsar, intending to invade this land of Britain, ordered that I should be flogged and crucified, saying:

" 'For your son looks strong, and he will die more painfully if he is flogged, because the flies will torture him. Let us see whether he will not talk, after they have tied him to the tree.' "

"What then?" asked the druid, with a strange expression in his eyes.

"Yes, what then?" said the woman, leaning further forward to watch Tros' face. There was a half smile on her lips.

"My father offered himself in place of me," said Tros.

"And you agreed to it!" said the woman, nodding, seeming to confirm her own suspicion, and yet dissatisfied.

Tros laughed at her.

"Gwenhwyfar, I am not thy lover!" he retorted, and the woman glared. "I said to Cæsar, I would die by any means rather than be the cause of my father's death; and I swore to him to his face, as I stood between the men who held me, that if my father should die first, at his hands, he must slay me, too, and swiftly.

"Cæsar understood that threat. He lapsed into thought a while, crossing one knee over the other, in order to appear at ease. But he was not at ease, and I knew then that he did not wish to slay either my father or me, having another use for us. So I said nothing."

"Most men usually say too much," the druid commented.

"AND presently Cæsar dismissed us, commanding that we should be confined in one hut together," Tros went on. "And for a long while my father and I said nothing, for fear the guard without might listen. But in the night we lay on the dirt floor with our heads together, whispering, and my father said:

" 'Death is but a little matter and soon over with, for even torture must come to an end; but a man's life should be lived to its conclusion, and it may be we can yet serve the purpose for which we came to Gaul.

" 'Remember this, my son,' said he, 'that whereas force may not prevail, a man may gain his end by seeming to yield, as a ship yields to the sea. And that is good, provided the ship does not yield too much and be swamped.'

"Thereafter we whispered far into the night. And in the morning when Cæsar sent for us we stood before him in silence, he considering our faces and our strength. My father is a stronger man than I.

"There were the ropes on the floor of the tent, with which they were ready to bind us; and there were knotted cords for the flogging; and two executioners, who stood outside the tent—they were Numidians—black men with very evil faces. And when he had considered us a long time Cæsar said:

" 'It is no pleasure to me to hand men of good birth over to the executioners.'

"He lied. There is nothing he loves better, for he craves the power of life and death, and the nobler his victim the more subtly he enjoys it. But we kept silence. Then he rearranged the wreath that he wears on his head to hide the baldness, and drew the ends of his scarlet cloak over his knees and smiled; for through the tent door he observed a woman they were bringing to him. He became in a hurry to have our business over with.

"It may be that the sight of the woman softened him, for she was very beautiful and very much afraid; or it may be that he knew all along what demand he would make. He made a gesture of magnanimity and said:

" 'I would that I might spare you; for you seem to me to be worthy men; but the affairs of the senate and the Roman people have precedence over my personal feelings, which all men will assure you are humane. If, out of respect for your good birth and courageous bearing—for I reckon courage chiefest of the virtues—I should not oblige you to reveal the druids' secrets, I would expect you in return to render Rome a service. Thereafter, you may both go free. What say you?'

"And my father answered:

" 'We would not reveal the druids' secrets, even if we knew them; nor are we afraid to die.'

"And Cæsar smiled.

" 'Brave men,' he said, 'are more likely than cowards to perform their promises. I am sending Caius Volusenus with a ship to the coast of Britain to discover harbors and the like, and to bring back information. If he can, he is to persuade the Britons not to oppose my landing; but if he can not, he is to discover the easiest place where troops may be disembarked. It would give me a very welcome opportunity to exercise my magnanimity, that I keep ever uppermost in mind, if both of you would give your promises to me to go with Caius Volusenus, to assist him with all your knowledge of navigation; and to return with him. Otherwise, I must not keep the executioners waiting any longer.'

"I looked into my father's eyes, and he into mine, and we nodded. My father said to Cæsar:

" 'We will go with Caius Volusenus and will return with him, on the condition of your quarantee that we may go free afterward. But we must be allowed to travel with proper dignity, as free men, with our weapons. Unless you will agree to that, you may as well command your executioners, for we will not yield.'

"And at that Cæsar smiled again, for he appreciates dignity—more especially if he can subtly submit it to an outrage.

" 'I have your promise then?' he asked; and we both said—

" 'Yes.'

"Whereat he answered:

" 'I am pleased. However, I will send but one of you. The other shall remain with me as hostage. You observe, I have not put you under oath, out of respect for your religion, which you have told me is very sacred and forbids the custom we Romans observe of swearing on the altar of the gods.'

"But he lied—he lied. Caesar cares nothing for religion.

" 'The son shall make the journey and the father shall remain,' he said to us, 'since I perceive that each loves the other. Should the son not keep his promise, then the father shall be put to certain trying inconveniences in the infliction of which, I regret to say, my executioners have a large experience.'

"He would have dismissed us there and then, but I remembered Conops, who alone of all our crew was living, and I was minded to save Conops. Also I knew that my father would wish that, and at any cost, although we dared not speak to each other in Cæsar's presence. So I answered:

" 'So be it, Cæsar. But the promise on your part is that I shall go with dignity, and thereto I shall need a servant.'

" 'I will give you a Gaul,' said he.

" 'I have no use for Gauls,' I answered. 'They are treacherous.' And at that he nodded. 'But there is one of our men,' said I, 'who escaped your well known clemency and still endures life. Mercifully, your lieutenants have deprived him of an eye, so he is not much use, but I prefer him, knowing he will not betray me to the Britons.'

"Cæsar was displeased with that speech, but he was eager they should bring the woman to him, so he gave assent. But he forbade me to speak with my father again until I should return from Britain, and they took my father away and placed him in close confinement.

"A little later they brought Conops to me, sick and starved; but the centurion who had charge of prisoners said to me that if I would promise to bring him back six fine pearls from Britain, he for his part would see to it that my father should be well treated in my absence. So I promised to do what might be done. I said neither yes nor no."

"We *have* pearls," said the woman, looking darkly at Tros, tossing her hair again.

"Nevertheless," Tros answered, "to give pearls to a Roman is to arouse greed less easy to assuage than fire!

"You said Cæsar will make himself master of the world. What made you say that?" asked the woman.

"I will tell that presently, Gwenhwyfar—when Cassivelaunus* and the other druids come," he answered.

CHAPTER II

"AND YE KNOW WHETHER CÆSAR LIES OR NOT."

THE long British twilight had deepened until the trees around the clearing were a whispering wall of gloom, and a few pale stars shone overhead. The wolves howled again, making the cattle shift restlessly within the fence, and a dozen dogs bayed angrily. But the five who sat by the rock

*By the Britons called Caswallon.

in the midst of the clearing made no move, except to glance expectantly toward the end of the glade.

And presently there began to be a crimson glow behind the trees. A chant, barbaric, weird and wonderful, without drumbeat or accompaniment, repeating and repeating one refrain, swelled through the trees as the crimson glow grew nearer.

Tros rose to his feet, but the druid and the others remained seated, the woman watching Tros as if she contemplated springing at him, although whether for the purpose of killing him, or not, was not so evident. Conops watched *her* equally intently.

It looked as if the forest were on fire, until men bearing torches appeared in the mouth of the glade and a long procession wound its way solemnly and slowly toward the rock. The others stood up then and grouped themselves behind Tros and the druid, the druid throwing back his head and chanting a response to the refrain, as if it were question and answer. The woman took her husband's hand, but he appeared hardly to notice it; he was more intent on watching the approaching druids, his expression a mixture of challenge and dissatisfaction. He began to look extremely dignified.

There were a dozen druids, clad in long robes, flanked and followed by torchbearers dressed in wolf-skin and knitted breeches. They were led by an old man whose white beard fell nearly to his waist. Five of the other druids were in white robes, and bearded, but the rest were clean shaven and in blue; all wore their hair long over their shoulders, and no druid had any weapon other than a sickle, tucked into a girdle at the waist. The torchbearers were armed with swords and spears; there were fifty of them, and nearly as many women, who joined in the refrain, but the old High Druid's voice boomed above all, mellow, resonant and musical.

The procession was solemn and the chant religious; yet there was hardly any ceremony when they came to a stand near the rock and the old druid strode out in front of the others, alone. The chant ceased then and for a moment there was utter silence; then the druid who had been acting interpreter took Tros' right hand and led him toward the old man, moving so as to keep Tros' hand concealed from those behind. The old man held out his own right hand, the younger druid lifting the end of Tros' cloak so as to conceal what happened.

A moment later Tros stepped back and saluted with the graceful Mediterranean gesture of the hand palm outward, and there the ceremony ceased.

The old druid sat down on a stone beside the rock; his fellow druids found places near him in an irregular semicircle; the crowd, shaking their torches at intervals to keep them burning, stood, the glare and the smoke making splotches of crimson and black against the trees.

"I would speak of the wolves of the Tiber!" he remarked. The younger druid spoke then in rapid undertones, apparently rehearsing to the older man the conversation that had preceded his arrival. Then Tros, with his left hand at his back and his right thrown outward in a splendid gesture that made Gwenhwyfar's eyes blaze, broke silence, speaking very loud:

"My father, I know nothing of the stars, beyond such lore as seamen use; but they who do know say that Cæsar's star is in ascension, and that nightly in the sky there gleam the omens of increasing war."

The High Druid nodded gravely. The chief let go his wife's hand, irritated because she seemed able to understand all that was said, whereas he could not. The younger druid whispered to him. It was growing very dark now, and scores of shadowy figures were gathering in the zone of torchlight from the direction of the forest. There was a low murmur, and an occasional clank of weapons. Tros, conscious of the increasing audience, raised his voice:

"They who sent me hither say this isle is sacred. Cæsar, whose camp-fires ye may see each night beyond the narrow sea that separates your cliffs from Gaul, is the relentless enemy of druids and of all who keep the ancient secret.

"Ye have heard—ye *must* have heard—how Cæsar has stamped out the old religion from end to end of Gaul, as his armies have laid the corn waste and destroyed walled towns. For Cæsar understands that where the Wisdom dwells, freedom persists and grows again, however many times its fields are reaped. Cæsar does not love freedom.

"In Gaul there is no druid now who dares to show himself; where Cæsar found them, he has thrown their tortured carcasses to feed the dogs and crows. And for excuse,

he says the druids make human sacrifice, averring that they burn their living victims in cages made of withes.

"Cæsar, who has slain his hecatombs, who mutilates and butchers men, women, children, openly in the name of Rome, but secretly for his own ambition; Cæsar, who has put to death more druids than the wolves would number that all of ye in all your lives have slain, *says* that the druids burn human sacrifices. And *ye* know whether Cæsar lies or not."

He paused and the ensuing silence was broken by the whispering of men and women who translated his words into the local dialect. Some of the druids moved among the crowd, assisting. Tros gave them time, watching the face of the chief and of his wife Gwenhwyfar, until the murmur died down into silence. Then he resumed:

"They who sent me into Gaul, are They who keep the Seed from which your druids' wisdom springs. But he who sent me to this isle is Cæsar. They who sent me into Gaul are They who never bowed a knee to conqueror and never by stealth or violence subdued a nation to their will. But he who sent me hither knows no other law than violence; no other peace than that imposed by him; no other object than his own ambition.

"He has subdued the north of Gaul; he frets in idleness and plays with women, because there are no more Gauls to conquer before winter sets in. He has sent me hither to bid you let him land on your coast with an army. The excuse he offers you, is that he wishes to befriend you.

"The excuse he sends to Rome, where his nominal masters spend the extorted tribute money wrung by him from Gauls to buy his own preferment, is that you Britons have been sending assistance to the Gauls, wherefore he intends to punish you. And the excuse he gives to his army is, that here is plunder—here are virgins, cattle, clothing, precious metals and the pearls with which he hopes to make a breastplate for the Venus Genetrix.

"Cæsar holds my father hostage against my return. I came in Cæsar's ship, whose captain, Caius Volusenus, ordered me to show him harbors where a fleet of ships might anchor safely, threatening me that, unless I show them to him, he will swear away my father's life on my return; for Caius Volusenus hopes for Cæsar's goodwill, and he knows the only way it may be had.

"But I told Caius Volusenus that I know no harbors. I persuaded him to beach his ship on the open shore, a two days' journey from this place. And there, where we landed with fifty men, we were attacked by Britons, of whom one wounded me, although I had not as much as drawn my sword.

"Your Britons drove the Romans back into the ship, which put to sea again, anchoring out of bowshot; but I, with my man Conops, remained prisoners in the Britons' hands—and a druid came, and stanched my wound.

"So I spoke with the druid—he is here—behold him—he will confirm my words. And a Roman was allowed to come from the ship and to take back a message to Caius Volusenus, that I am to be allowed to speak with certain chiefs and thereafter that I may return to the ship; but that none from the ship meanwhile may set foot on the shore.

"And in that message it was said that I am to have full opportunity to deliver to you Cæsar's words, and to obtain your consent, if ye will give it, to his landing with an army before the winter storms set in.

"Thus Caius Volusenus waits. And yonder on the coast of Gaul waits Cæsar. My father waits with shackles on his wrists. And I, who bring you Cæsar's message, and who love my father, and who myself am young, with all my strength in me, so that death can not tempt, and life seems good and full of splendor—I say to you: Defy this Cæsar!"

HE WOULD have said more, but a horn sounded near the edge of the trees and another twenty men strode into the clearing, headed by a Gaul who rode beside a Briton in a British chariot. The horses were half frantic from the torchlight and fear of wolves, but their heads were held by men in wolf-skin who kept them to the track by main strength. Conops plucked at the skirt of Tros' tunic:

"Commius!" he whispered, and Tros growled an answer under his breath.

The two men in the chariot stood upright with the dignity of kings, and as they drew near, with the torchlight shining on their faces, Tros watched them narrowly. But

Conops kept his one bright eye on Gwenhwyfar, for she, with strange, nervous twitching of the hands, was watching Tros as intently as *he* eyed the stranger. Her breast was heaving.

The man pointed out as Commius was a strongly built, black-bearded veteran, who stood half a head shorter than the Briton in the chariot beside him. He was dressed in a Roman toga, but with a tunic of unbleached Gaulish wool beneath. His eyes were bold and crafty; his head proud and erect; his smile assuring.

Somewhere there was a trace of weakness in his face, but it was indefinable—suggestive of lack of honor rather than physical cowardice, and, at that, not superficial. His beard came up high on his cheek bones and his black hair low on a broad and thoughtful forehead.

"Britomaris!" cried the driver of the chariot—and he was a chief beyond shadow of doubt, with his skin stained blue and his wolf-skins fastened by a golden brooch; a shaggy-headed, proud-eyed man with whipcord muscles and a bold smile half-hidden under a heavy brown mustache.

The husband of Gwenhwyfar stood up, dignified enough but irresolute, his smoldering eyes sulky and his right hand pushing at his wife to make her keep behind him. She stood staring over his shoulder, whispering between her teeth into his ear. The chief who drove the horses spoke again, and the tone of his loud voice verged on the sarcastic:

"O Britomaris, this is Commius, who comes from Gaul to tell us about Cæsar. He brings gifts."

At the mention of gifts Britomaris would have stepped up to the chariot, but his wife prevented, tugging at him, whispering; but none noticed that except Tros, Conops and the druids.

At a signal from the other chief a man in wolf-skins took up the presents from the chariot and brought them—a cloak of red cloth, a pair of Roman sandals and three strings of brass beads threaded on a copper wire.

It was cheap stuff of lower quality than the trade goods that occasional Roman merchants brought to British shores. Britomaris touched the gifts without any display of satisfaction. He hardly glanced at them, perhaps because his wife was whispering.

"Who is here?" asked Commius, looking straight at Tros.

At that Conops took a swift stride closer to his master, laying a hand on the hilt of his long knife. Gwenhwyfar laughed, and Britomaris nudged her angrily.

"I am one who knows Commius the Gaul!" said Tros, returning stare for stare. "I am another who runs Cæsar's errands, although Caesar never offered me a puppet kingdom. Thou and I, O Commius, have eaten leavings from the same trough. Shall we try to persuade free men that it is a good thing to be slaves?"

The chief who had brought Commius laughed aloud, for he understood the Gaulish, and he also seemed to understand the meaning of Gwenhwyfar's glance at Britomaris. Commius, his grave eyes missing nothing of the scene, stepped down from the chariot and, followed by a dozen men with torches, walked straight up to Tros.

His face looked deathly white in the torch glare, but whether or not he was angry it was difficult to guess, because he smiled with thin lips and had his features wholly in control. Tros smiled back at him, good nature uppermost, but an immense suspicion in reserve.

Gwenhwyfar, clinging to her man's arm, listened with eager eyes and parted lips. Conops drew his knife clandestinely and hid it in a tunic fold.

"I know the terms on which Cæsar sent you. I know who is hostage for you in Cæsar's camp," said Commius; and Tros, looking down at him, for he was taller by a full hand's breadth and stood on slightly higher ground, laid a heavy right hand on his shoulder.

"Commius," he said, "it may be well to yield to Cæsar for the sake of temporary peace—to give a breathing spell to Gaul—to save thine own neck, that the Gauls may have a leader when the time comes. For this Cæsar, who seems invincible, will hardly live forever; and the Gauls in their day of defeat have need of you as surely as they will need your leadership when Cæsar's bolt is shot. That day will come. But is it the part of a man, to tempt these islanders to share your fate?"

"Tros, you are rash!" said Commius, speaking through his teeth. "I am the friend of Cæsar."

"I am the friend of all the world, and

that is a higher friendship," Tros answered. "Though I were the friend of Cæsar, I would nonetheless hold Cæsar less than Gaul, and Gaul less than the whole world. But I speak of this isle and its people. Neither you nor I are Britons. Shall we play the man toward these folk, or shall we ruin them?"

The crowd was pressing closer, and the chief in his chariot urged the horses forward so that he might overhear; their white heads tossed in the torchlight like fierce apparitions from another world.

"If I dared trust you," Commius said, his black eyes searching Tros' face.

"Do the Gauls trust *you?*" asked Tros. "Are you a king among the Gauls? You may need *friends* from Britain when the day comes."*

"You intend to betray me to Cæsar!" said Commius, and at that Tros threw back his shock of hair and laughed, his eyes in the torchlight showing more red than amber.

"If that is all your wisdom, I waste breath," he answered.

Commius was about to speak when another voice broke on the stillness, and all eyes turned toward the rock. The old High Druid had climbed to its summit and stood leaning on a staff, his long beard whiter than stone against the darkness and ruffled in the faint wind—a splendid figure, dignity upholding age.

"O Cassivelaunus, and you, O Britomaris, and ye sons of the isle, hear my words!" he began.

And as the crowd surged for a moment, turning to face the rock and listen, Gwenhwyfar wife of Britomaris came and tugged at Tros' sleeve. He thought it was Conops, and waited, not moving his head, expecting a whispered warning; but the woman tugged again and he looked down into her glowing eyes. She pointed toward the house at the far end of the clearing.

"Thither I go," she whispered. "If you are as wise as you seem fearless, you will follow."

"I would hear this druid," Tros answered, smiling as he saw the point of Conops' knife within a half inch of the woman's ribs.

"He will talk until dawn!"

"Nonetheless, I will hear him."

"You will hear what is more important if you follow me," she answered; and at that she left him, stepping back so quickly that the point of Conops' long knife pricked her and she struck him angrily, then vanished like a shadow.

TROS strode slowly after her, with Conops at his heels, but when he reached the gloom beyond the outskirts of the crowd he paused.

"Am I followed?" he asked.

"Nay, master. They are like the fish around a dead man. One could gather all of them within a net. Do we escape?"

"I know what the druid will say," Tros answered. "I could say it myself. What that woman has to say to me, I know not. Though it may be she has set an ambush."

Conops chuckled.

"Aye! The kind of ambush they set for sailormen on the wharfsides of Saguntum! A long drink, and then——"

He whistled a few bars of the love song of the Levantine ports:

> "Oh, what is in the wind that fills
> The red sail straining at the mast?
> Oh, what beneath the purple hills
> That overlean the Cydnus thrills
> The sailor seeing land at last?
> Oh, Chloe and——"

"Be still!" commanded Tros. "If there were no more risk than that, my father would be free tomorrow! Which way went the woman?"

Conops pointed.

"That Briton who came in the chariot—Cassivelaunus—fills my eye. But I would not trust Commius the Gaul; he has a dark look."

"He is anxious for his Gauls, as I am anxious for my father," Tros answered. "He hates Cæsar, and he likes me; but for the sake of his Gauls he would stop at nothing. He would bring Cæsar to this island, just to give the Atrebates time to gather strength at Cæsar's rear. Nay, he may not be trusted."

"Master, will you trust these Britons?" Conops asked him, suddenly, from behind, as he followed close in his steps along a track that wound among half-rotted tree stumps toward the cattle fence. Tros turned and faced him.

"It is better that the Britons should trust *me*," he answered.

*Cæsar made Commius king of the Atrebates, half of which tribe lived in Britain and half in Gaul. There is no historic record, however, of the British Atrebates having accepted Curin as king.

"But to what end, master?"

"There are two ends to everything in this world, even to a ship," said Tros darkly; "two ends to Cæsar's trail, and two ways of living life: On land or water. Make sure we are not followed."

The dogs barked fiercely as they approached the fence, and Conops grew nervous, pulling at his master's cloak.

"Nay, it is a good sign," said Tros. "If it were a trap they would have quieted the dogs."

He turned again to make sure no one was following. The torchlight shone on the High Druid's long white robe and whiter beard, and on a sea of faces that watched him breathlessly. The old man was talking like a waterfall. They were too far away now for his words to reach them, but judging by his gestures he was very angry and was in no mood to be brief.

"On guard!" warned Conops suddenly as they started toward the fence again, but Tros made no move to reach his sword.

It was the woman Gwenhwyfar, waiting in a shadow. She stepped out into the firelight that shone through a gap in the fence and signed to Tros to follow her, leading around to the rear of the house, where a door, sheltered by a rough porch, opened toward the forest.

She led the way in, and they found themselves in a room whose floor was made of mud and cow dung trampled hard. There was a fire in the midst, and a hole in the roof to let the smoke out. She spoke to a hag dressed in ragged skins, who stirred the fire to provide light and then vanished through an inner door.

The firelight shone on smooth mud walls, adzed beams, two benches and a table.

"Your home?" asked Tros, puzzled, and Gwenhwyfar laughed.

"I am a chief's wife; I am wife of Britomaris," she answered. "Our serfs, who mind the cattle, live in this place."

"Where then is your home?" asked Tros.

She pointed toward the north.

"When Cassivelaunus comes there, we leave home," she answered. "The power to use our house is his, but we are not his serfs."

Gwenhwyfar's attitude suggested secrecy, and she seemed to wish Tros to speak first, as if she would prefer to answer questions rather than to force the conversation. She looked extremely beautiful in the firelight; the color had risen to her cheeks and her eyes shone like jewels, brighter than the gleaming ornaments on her hair and arms and breast.

"Why do you fear Cassivelaunus?" Tros asked her suddenly.

"I? I am not afraid!" she answered. "Britomaris fears him, but not I! Why should I be afraid? Cassivelaunus is a strong chief, a better man than Britomaris; and I hate him! He—how strong is Cæsar?" she demanded.

Tros studied her a moment. He gave her no answer. She sat down on one of the benches, signing to him and Conops to be seated on the other.

"You said that Cæsar will make himself the master of the world," she remarked after a minute, stretching her skin-clad legs toward the blaze. She was not looking at Tros now but at the fire. "Why did you say that?" she asked him.

Suddenly she met his eyes, and glanced away again. Conops went and sat down on the floor on the far side of the fire.

CHAPTER III

GWENHWYFAR, WIFE OF BRITOMARIS

TROS made no answer for a long time, but stared first at the fire and then at Gwenhwyfar.

"Send that man away," she suggested, nodding toward Conops; but Tros scratched his chin and smiled.

"I prefer to be well served," he answered. "How can he keep secrets unless he knows them? Nay, nay, Gwenhwyfar; two men with three eyes are as good again as one man with but two; and even so, the two are not too many when another's wife bears watching! Speak on."

Her eyes lighted up with challenge as she tossed her head. But she laughed and came to the point at once, looking straight and hard at him.

"Commius spoke to me of Cæsar. Commius declared to me he is the deputy of Cæsar. Commius urged me to go with him and visit Cæsar. Britomaris is a weak chief; he has no will; he hates Cassivelaunus, and yet bows to him. Cæsar is strong."

"I am *not* Cæsar's deputy, whatever Commius may be," said Tros. "But this I tell you, and you may as well remember it, Gwenhwyfar: A thousand women have

listened to Cæsar's wooing, and I have been witness of the fate of some. There was a woman of the Gauls, a great chief's daughter, who offered herself to him to save her people. Cæsar passed her on to one of his lieutenants, and thereafter sold her into slavery."

"Perhaps she did not please him," Gwenhwyfar answered. And then, since Tros waited in silence, "I have pearls."

"You have also my advice regarding them," said Tros.

Gwenhwyfar waited a full minute, thinking, as it were appraising him. She nodded, three times, slowly.

"You, who have lost all except your manhood and the clothes you wear!" she said at last, and her voice was bold and stirring, "what is *your* ambition?"

"To possess a ship," he answered, so promptly that he startled her.

"A ship? Is that all?"

"Aye, and enough. A man is master on his own poop. A swift ship, a crew well chosen, and a man may laugh at Cæsars."

"And yet—you say, you had a ship? And a crew well chosen?"

Tros did not answer. His brows fell heavily and half concealed eyes that shone red in the firelight.

"Better be Cæsar's ward, and rule a kingdom, than wife of a petty chief who dares not disobey Cassivelaunus," Gwenhwyfar said, looking her proudest. "Cassivelaunus might have had me to wife, but *he* chose Fflur. There was nothing left for me but Britomaris. If he were a strong man I could have loved him. He is weak.

"He likes to barter wolfskins on the shore with Roman and Tyrrian traders. He pays tribute to Cassivelaunus. He does not even dare to build a town and fortify it, lest Cassivelaunus should take offence.

"He obeys the druids, as a child obeys its nurse, in part because he is afraid of them, but also because it is the easiest thing to do. He is not a man, such as Cassivelaunus might have been—such as *you* are."

She paused, with parted lips, looking full and straight at Tros. Conops tapped the dirt floor rhythmically with the handle of his knife. A man in the next room began singing about old mead and the new moon.

"It is a ship, not a woman that I seek," said Tros, and her expression hardened.

But she tried again:

"You might have a hundred ships."

"I will be better satisfied with *one*."

She began to look baffled; eyes and lips hinted anger that she found it difficult to hold in check.

"Is that your price?" she asked. "A ship?"

"Woman!" said Tros after a minute's silence, laying his great right fist on his knee, "you and I have no ground we can meet on. You would sell your freedom. I would die for mine."

"Yet you live!" she retorted. "Did you come to Britain of your free will? Where is your freedom? You are Cæsar's messenger!"

She got up suddenly and sat down on the bench beside him, he not retreating an inch. Not even his expression changed, but his shoulders were rigid and his hands were pressing very firmly on his knees.

"Do you not understand?" she asked.

"I understand," he answered.

Suddenly she flared up, her eyes blazing and her voice trembling. She did not speak loud, but with a slow distinctness that made each word like an arrow speeding to the mark.

"Am I not fair?" she asked, and he nodded.

Her eyes softened for a moment, then she went on:

"Cassivelaunus was the first and is the last who shall deny me! I can be a good wife—a very god's wife to a man worth loving! Cæsar can conquer Cassivelaunus, but not alone. He will need my help, and yours. Cæsar made Commius a king over the Atrebates; and what was Commius before that? Cæsar shall make me a queen where Cassivelaunus lords it now! And you——?"

"And Britomaris?" asked Tros, watching her.

"And you?" she said again, answering stare for stare.

Her breast was heaving quickly, like a bird's.

"Oh, Tros!" she went on. "Are you a man, or are you timid? Here a kingdom waits for you! Yonder, in Gaul, is Cæsar, who can make and unmake kingdoms! Here am I! I am a woman, I am all a woman. I love manhood. I do not love Britomaris."

Conops stirred the fire.

"Do you not see that if you are all a woman you must oppose Cæsar?" Tros

asked. "*Then*—let Cæsar outrage! Let him slay! He will have done nothing, because your spirit will go free, Gwenhwyfar. Cæsar plans an empire of men's bodies, with his own—his epileptic, foul, unchaste and hairless head crowned master of them all! Whoso submits to him is a slave—a living carcass. Hah! Defy him! Scorn him! Resist him to the last breath! The worst he can do then will be to torture a brave body till the braver soul goes free!"

His words thrilled her.

"Well enough," she answered promptly. "I am brave. I can defy Cæsar. But I need a braver chief to make the stand with me than Britomaris. If Cassivelaunus had taken me to wife—but he chose Fflur—perhaps it was as well—you are nobler than Cassivelaunus, and ——"

"And what?" asked Tros.

She answered slowly:

"A bold man now could conquer Britain. The druids—I know them—the druids would support one who opposed the Romans. They fear for their own power should Cæsar gain a foothold. The druids trust you. Why? They do not trust me. Tros! Strike a bargain with the druids. Slay Cassivelaunus! Seize the chieftainship, and raise an army against Cæsar!"

"And Britomaris?"

"Challenge him!" she answered. "He would run! I have the right to leave a man who runs away."

"Gwenhwyfar!" Tros exclaimed, getting up and standing straight in front of her. "It is Cæsar, and not I who has the falling sickness! You and I lack that excuse! Know this: I will neither steal a wife from Britomaris, nor a throne from Cassivelaunus; nor will I impose my will on Britain."

She stood up, too, and faced him, very angry.

"Have you never loved?" she asked, and though her eyes were steady, the gold brooch on her breast was fluttering.

"Loved? Aye, like a man!" he answered. "I have loved the sea since I was old enough to scramble down the cliffs of Samothrace and stand knee deep to watch the waves come in! The sea is no man's master, nor a bed of idleness! The sea holds all adventure and the keys of all the doors of the unknown!

"The sea, Gwenhwyfar, is the image of a man's life. If he flinches, if he fails, it drowns him. Is he lazy, does he fail to mend his ship or steadfastly to be example to his crew, there are rocks, shoals, tides, the pirates, storms. But is he stanch, he sails, until he reaches unknown ports, where the gods trade honestly for the experience he brings! I seek but a ship, Gwenhwyfar. I will carve a destiny that suits me better than a stolen kingdom and a cheated husband's bed!"

She reached out a hand unconsciously and touched his arm:

"Tros," she answered, "Cassivelaunus has some longships hidden in the marshes of the Thames. Take me—take a ship, and ——"

"Nay," he answered. "Cassivelaunus owes me nothing. He who owes me a good ship is Cæsar!"

"And you think that you can make Cæsar pay?" she asked. "Take me to Cæsar, Tros; between us we will cheat him of a ship! With you to teach me, I could learn to love the sea."

He stepped back a pace or two, would have stumbled backward against the clay hearth if Conops had not warned him.

"None *learns* to love," he answered. "Love is a man's nature. He *is* this, or he *is* that; none can change him. I am less than half a man, until I feel the deck heave under me and look into a rising gale. You, Gwenhwyfar, you are less than half a woman until you pit your wits against a man who loves to master you; and I find no amusement in such mastery. Make love to Britomaris."

She reddened in the firelight, stood up very proudly, biting her lip. Her eyes glittered, but she managed to control herself; there were no tears.

"Shall I bear a coward's children?" she demanded.

"I know not," said Tros. "You shall not bear mine. I will save you, if I can, from Cæsar."

Tears were very near the surface now, but pride, and an emotion that she did her utmost to conceal, aided her to hold them back.

"Forgive me!" she said suddenly.

Her hands dropped, but she raised them again and folded them across her breast.

"Forgive me, Tros! I was mad for a short minute. It *is* maddening to be a coward's wife. I tempted you, to see how much a man you truly are."

Conops' knife hilt tapped the floor in slow staccato time.

"Kiss me, and say good-by," she coaxed, unclasping her hands again.

"Nay, no good-bys!" he answered, laughing. "We shall meet again. And as for kissing, a wise seaman takes no chances near the rocks, Gwenhwyfar!"

Stung — savage — silent — she gestured proudly with her head toward the door, folding her arms on her breast, and Tros, bowing gravely, strode out into darkness. Conops shut the door swiftly behind them.

"If this isle were in *our* sea, she would have thrown a knife," said Conops, twitching his shoulder-blades. "Master, you have made an enemy."

"Not so," Tros answered. "I have found one. Better the rocks in sight than shoals unseen, my lad! Let us see now who our friends are."

HE STRODE toward the torchlight, where the old High Druid was still holding forth, swaying back and forward on the summit of the rock as he leaned to hurl his emphasis. More chariots had come and horses' heads were nodding on the outskirts of the crowd—phantoms in the torch-smoke.

Tros kept to the deeper shadows, circling the crowd until he could approach Commius and Cassivelaunus from the rear. He was stared at by new arrivals as he began to work his way toward them, but the Britons had too good manners and too much dignity to interfere with him or block his way.

The women in the crowd stared and smiled, standing on tiptoe some of them, frankly curious, but neither impudent nor timid. Most of them were big-eyed women with long eyelashes and well combed braided hair hanging to the waist. Nearly all had golden ornaments; but there were slave women among them, who seemed to belong to another race, dressed in plain wool or even plainer skins.

It was a crowd that, on the whole, was more than vaguely conscious of the past it sprung from.

Glances cast at Tros were less of admiration than expectancy, to see him exhibit manners less civilized than theirs—the inevitable attitude of islanders steeped in tradition and schooled in the spiritual mysticism of the druids—proud, and yet considerate of the stranger—warlike, because decadence had undermined material security, but chivalrous because chivalry never dies until the consciousness of noble ancestry is dead, and theirs was living.

Commius the Gaul, who, when he was not deliberately controlling his expression, had the hard face and the worried look of a financier, was seated beside Cassivelaunus. The chief was standing in the chariot, his gold-and-amber shoulder-ornaments shining in the torchlight. He smiled when he caught sight of Tros, and with a nudge stirred Commius out of a brown study. Commius, adjusting his expression carefully, got down from the chariot, took Tros' arm, and led him to the chief.

"Tros, son of Perseus, Prince of Samothrace," he announced.

Cassivelaunus stretched out a long, white, sleeveless arm, on which strange pagan designs had been drawn in light-blue woad. It was an immensely strong arm, with a heavy golden bracelet on the wrist.

They shook hands and, without letting go, the chieftain pulled Tros up into the chariot. Britomaris, from about a chariot's length away, watched thoughtfully, peering past a woman's shoulder.

The old High Druid was talking too fast for Tros to follow him; he was holding the rapt attention of the greater part of the crowd, and it was less than a minute before Tros was forgotten. The old druid had them by the ears, and their eyes became fixed on his face as if he hypnotized them.

But his eloquence by no means hypnotized himself. His bright old eyes scanned the faces in the torchlight as if he were judging the effect of what he said, and he turned at intervals to face another section of the crowd, signing to the torchmen to distribute their light where he needed it.

Moreover, he changed his tone of voice and his degree of vehemence to suit whichever section of the crowd he happened to be facing. There were groups of dark-haired swarthy men and women, who looked consciously inferior to the taller, white-skinned, reddish-haired breed, or, if not consciously inferior, then aware that the others thought them so. He spoke to them in gentler, more persuasive cadences.

Cassivelaunus watched the druid in silence for a long time; yet he hardly appeared to be listening; he seemed rather to be waiting for a signal. At last he lost

patience and whispered to a man in a leather, sleeveless tunic who leaned on a spear beside the chariot.

The man whispered to one of the younger druids, who approached the pulpit rock from a side that at the moment was in darkness. Climbing, he lay there in shadow and, watching his opportunity when the old man paused for breath, spoke a dozen words.

The old druid nodded and dismissed him with a gesture. The younger druid worked his way back through the crowd to the chariot wheel and whispered to Cassivelaunus.

The man with the spear received another whispered order from the chief, and he repeated it to others. Without any appearance of concerted action, the torchmen began to edge themselves in both directions toward the far side of the rock, until the near side was in almost total darkness.

Then Cassivelaunus took the reins without a word to Tros, and the man with the spear spoke to Commius the Gaul, who climbed into another chariot. The horses began to plunge, but Cassivelaunus pulled them backward, edging the chariot gradually into deeper shadow.

Two other chariots followed suit; and in one there was a woman, who drove, and who had magnificent brown hair that reached below her waist. Conops jumped in and, curling on the floor, made ready to cling to Tros' leg in case of need; being a seaman, he had no love, and less experience of chariots.

Suddenly Cassivelaunus wheeled his team and sent it at full gallop toward the end of the lane that led into the forest. She who drove the second chariot wheeled after him; and a third, in which Commius the Gaul was clinging, bumped over the rotting tree-roots in the wake.

The pace, once the horses sprung into their stride, was furious. Tros, forever mindful of his dignity, clung nevertheless to the chariot side, setting his teeth as the wheels struck ruts and branches, feeling as if the dimly seen milk-white of the horses were foaming waves, and himself in a ship's bow on the lookout for unknown rocks.

They plunged into the forest, where the oaks met overhead. There was a sound, that might have been the sea, of wind in the upper branches—a sensation of tremendous speed—and nothing visible except the sudden-looming tree-trunk, which seemed to miss the wheel by hair's breadths.

There was a thudding of wheels and a thunder of pursuing hoofs, a splash now and then where shallow water lay in unseen hollows, a smell of horseflesh, and of rotting leaves, and a whirring of unseen bats. One bat struck Tros in the face, and fell to the floor of the chariot, where Conops drew his knife and slew it—believing then, and forever afterwards, that he had killed a devil.

The horses appeared to be frantic and out of hand, and yet Cassivelaunus managed them with art that concealed all method, standing with one foot resting on a sort of step, no more than feeling at the horses' mouths, balancing his weight as if by instinct in advance of sudden turns and low obstructions that the horses took in their stride, but that threw the chariot a yard in air.

Long—endless to Tros—darkness, and then moonlight silhouetting ghostly tree trunks, a splash through a shadowy ford, then through a mile of stumps and seedlings at the forest's edge into a belt of fern and lush grass glistening with dew, and at last a rolling down, where patches of chalk gleamed milk white under the moon and the track swung around a hillside under a scattering of fleecy clouds.

Then Cassivelaunus glanced at Tros, and Tros forced a great good-natured grin:

"O Chief," he said, "you are the first who has made me feel that kind of fear!"

Cassivelaunus smiled, but the ends of his long mustache concealed what kind of smile it was. Instead of answering he glanced over his shoulder at the second chariot, not fifty yards behind. There was a woman driving it.

Then, with one swift look into Tros' eyes, he shook the reins and shouted to the team—a trumpet shout, that held a sort of note of laughter, but not of mockery to which a guest could take exception. He seemed pleased to have shown his prowess to a foreigner, that was all.

CHAPTER IV

FFLUR

WOLVES worrying a kill yelped and vanished into shadow as the chariot thundered around a shoulder of the down and passed a cluster of low, flint-and-mud-

built cottages with wooden roofs, surrounded by a wall, within which was bleating and the stifling smell of sheep.

Beyond that the moonlight shone on a big thatched house surrounded by a wooden paling. It was high and oblong, but of only one story with projecting eaves, built of wooden beams with flints and chalk packed into the interstices. Light shone through the chinks of the shutters. There were no trees near it.

They were expected, for a gate was flung wide at the sound of their approach and a dozen men with spears and shields formed up in line outside the entrance, raising their spears as Cassivelaunus drove full-gallop past them.

Within the paling there was a smell of horses that stamped and whinnied at their pickets under a lean-to roof. The house door opened, showing a blazing fire on a hearth exactly facing it. Cassivelaunus drew the team up on its haunches, and almost before their fore feet touched the ground again he let go the reins, jumped along the chariot pole, touching it lightly once with one foot, and seized their heads.*

Six women stood in the doorway, with three children clinging to their skirts.

Some one with dark, shaggy hair, who wore nothing but a wolf-skin, led away the horses just in time to avoid the second chariot that thundered through the gate and drew up as the first had done.

And, as the horses pawed the air, the woman who was driving dropped the reins and exactly repeated Cassivelaunus' feat, springing along the pole to the ground to seize their heads. There was no sign yet of the third chariot and Commius. A man stepped out behind the chariot the woman had been driving and held the horses until another man dressed in skins came and led them away.

"O Tros, this is Fflur. She is my wife," said Cassivelaunus, taking her by the hand.

She stepped forward and kissed Tros on both cheeks, then stepped back to her husband's side, and Tros wondered at her, for she was good to look at—strong, modest, matronly, gray-eyed, and dressed in embroidered woolen stuff, with a bodice of laced leather that showed the outlines of her graceful figure. There were pearls in her hair and in the big round brooches on her dress.

It was she who led the way into the house, scolding the dogs, throwing an arm about one of the women in the doorway, asking why the children were not asleep in bed—a very gracious lady, full of dignity and laughter and sincerity.

"This is not my house," said Cassivelaunus, taking Tros by the arm. "I am the chief. They pay me tribute from the fenland to the sea. It is a good kingdom. You shall tell me about Cæsar."

He did not wait for Conops' chariot but followed his wife into the house and shut the door behind him, pushing away the dogs, rolling one of them over playfully with his foot—then tasting a tankard of mead that his wife took from a woman's hand and brought to him.

He only sipped, then handed the tankard to Tros, who drank the half of it and passed it back. Cassivelaunus swallowed the remainder, gave the empty tankard to a woman, wiped his wet mustache on a woolen towel that the woman passed to him, smiled and handed the towel to Tros.

"So one of us clove your chin? Was it a good blow?" he asked, laying a big white hand with rings on it on Tros' shoulder.

"No. A blow in haste," said Tros. "He was not strong."

"He is very strong. His name is Erbin. He can throw a full-sized bullock by the horns. You broke his ribs," said Cassivelaunus. "Can you break mine?"

"I *will* not," Tros answered.

Cassivelaunus laughed, half-disappointed, wholly admiring Tros' strength, flexing his own great shoulder muscles as he led to where two high-backed oaken seats faced each other on opposite sides of the hearth.

He threw himself on one, shoving the dogs away as he thrust his skin-clad legs toward the fire, signing to Tros to take the other.

Then he unbuckled his long sword, and Tros followed suit, each man setting his own weapon against the wall. Conops sat down on the floor beside the hearth, within reach of Tros' legs, and a woman brought him a tankard of mead all to himself.

It was a high, oblong room, with great black beams overhead, from which hams and sides of bacon hung in the smoke, that rose from the hearth and lost itself up in

*This was a favorite trick of the Briton's in battle.

the shadows below the thatch. There was no light except from the fire, but one of the women prodded that to keep it blazing, and when she disappeared Conops assumed the duty.

Three sleepy children, two boys and a girl, came and clung to Cassivelaunus' legs, begging him to to tell them stories, but after he had tousled up their hair and rolled one of them on the floor among the dogs, he dismissed them, calling to one of the women to make them go to bed.

His wife Fflur was already busy with her women in another room; there was a clattering of dishes,

"And Cæsar?" said Cassivelaunus. "I am told you know him? We can talk here."

He leaned against the back of the seat with his hands on his knees and looked at Tros confidently. His was the gift good breeding produces, of putting a guest mentally at ease. He spoke as to an equal, without any loss of dignity.

"Has Commius not told you?" Tros asked, and Cassivelaunus nodded.

"Commius also is a guest," he remarked. "But the chariot in which he rides will come more slowly. I ordered it."

"Commius," said Tros, "owes his life and his wealth to Cæsar. If I know anything of men, then Commius hates Cæsar, but is thinking of the Atrebates and the other Gauls. If Cæsar should invade this island, Commius might persuade the Gauls to rise behind him. If that is not his plan, at least he thinks of it.

"He is a Gaul at heart, but afraid for his own skin and his own possessions. He does not dare speak openly, lest someone should betray his speech to Cæsar. Commius is a watchful and secretive man. He will stop at nothing to help the Gauls, provided he can save his own skin."

Cassivelaunus nodded.

"And you?" he asked. "Did not Cæsar send *you?*"

"My father is hostage in Cæsar's camp I was to show the coast and the harbors to Caius Volusenus. I risk my own life and my father's; but I warn you to oppose Cæsar—to resist his landing in all ways possible."

"Why do you do that?" asked Cassivelaunus. "If you were my own brother, or my wife's son, I could understand it. But you are neither a Briton nor a Gaul."

He spoke as if he expected explanations that would satisfy, but nevertheless demanded them.

"Ask the druids," Tros answered. "They will tell you, if they see fit."

"You are a kind of druid?"

"No," said Tros.

"Perhaps you are a greater than a druid?"

"If you speak of my father—yes. As for me, I am a young man yet. Most of my life I have spent voyaging. In that way a man learns one thing, but not another. I am not deep in the Mysteries, but my father Perseus is a Prince of Samothrace."

Cassivelaunus nodded again, but did not pretend to understand more than vaguely.

"I have *heard* of the Mysteries of Samothrace," he said respectfully. "I am a king. The druids say I am a good enough one. If Cæsar wants my kingdom he must fight for it. I have said so to Commius."

"Have you quarreled with Commius?" asked Tros.

"No. He is my guest. He brought presents from Cæsar, a lot of trash that the women laughed at. I will send him back to Cæsar with some valuable gifts, to show him how a king is generous."

"Thus whetting Cæsar's appetite!" said Tros drily. "If you send a gift like that to Cæsar, lay your plans well, Cassivelaunus! Good enough, if you bait an ambush for the Roman wolf. Be ready for him, that is all! Be sure what you are doing!"

The humorous, middle-aged, boyish face of Cassivelaunus began to look puzzled. He was plainly meditating a blunt question, and yet too polite to ask it.

"Some men seek revenge, some fame, some riches, some authority," he said at last, twisting at his long mustache. "All men whom I ever met sought something for themselves."

Whereat Tros grinned.

"I seek to keep my father's good opinion and to earn the praise of Those who sent me into Gaul," he answered.

"Nothing else?" asked Cassivelaunus, watching his face steadily.

"I need a ship."

"I have ships."

"So has Cæsar. Big ones, that can outfight yours."

Cassivelaunus pushed a dog out of the way and stirred the fire with his foot.

"Do you propose to help me against

Cæsar if I offer you a ship?" he asked, looking at Tros sideways, suddenly.

"No," said Tros. "I swear no oaths. I make no bargains. I will help you if I can, and freely. It is Cæsar who owes me a ship, having burnt mine. If a day comes when I think *you* owe me anything, I will demand it of you."

"You will demand a ship of Cæsar?"

Tros laughed. "As well demand a fat lamb of a wolf! But you are not Cæsar. I would ask a debt of you, and you would pay it."

"If I thought I owed it, yes," said Cassivelaunus. It was evident that he liked Tros finely. "I will give you a ship now, if you have need of it."

But Tros shook his head.

"What is the matter with my ships?" Cassivelaunus asked him. There was challenge in his voice.

"You forget. My father is a hostage. I must set him free before I play my own hand."

"Yes. A man should do that."

"You want me to help you set your father free?" asked Cassivelaunus, lowering his eyebrows. "How could I do that? My men would laugh at me, if I talked of invading Gaul! The druids would forbid it. Fflur would say no to it. Besides, I have never seen your father. Has he a claim on me?"

"No claim," Tros answered. "None. But Cæsar says he has a claim against you."

"Then he lies!" remarked Cassivelaunus.

He himself did not look like a man who dealt in lies.

"And he will invade your island to levy tribute."

"It is I who levy tribute here!" Cassivelaunus said slowly scratching a dog's back with his foot.

He stared at the fire for about a minute, frowning.

"If you resolve to oppose Cæsar, will your men obey you?" wondered Tros.

"They have had to hitherto. I am the chief. There have been a few disputes, but I am more the chief than ever," he answered.

"Are you overconfident?" asked Tros. "Cæsar's method is to send his spies who promise big rewards and make atrocious threats, thus undermining a chief's authority."

"I have kept close watch on Commius."

"No doubt you have," said Tros. "Nevertheless, this night a woman offered me your kingdom if I would play Cæsar's game with her."

At that Cassivelaunus suddenly threw off his thoughtful mood and laughed boisterously, hugely, spanking both knees with his hands so thunderously that the dogs yelped and Fflur came in with her wrists all white with meal to learn what the joke might be.

"Fflur — hah-hah-ho-ho-hoh! — yah-ha-ha-hah! Fflur, have you heard the latest? Britomaris' wife Gwenhwyfar offers our kingdom to this man! What do you think of that?"

"I mentioned no name," said Tros.

"No! Hah-ha-ha-ho-hoh! That is a good one. Haw-haw-hah-hah-hoh! She hasn't a name *worth* mentioning! Hah-hah-hah! What say you, Fflur? Shall I put her in a sack and send her for a gift to Cæsar?"

"You know she is dangerous," his wife answered.

"*She!*" laughed Cassivelaunus. "If she had a man like Tros here, she might be dangerous, but not with Britomaris! And if she were truly dangerous, she would have poisoned both of us—oh, years ago! I will let her try her blandishments on Cæsar."

"You are always overconfident," said Fflur, and left the room again, adding over her shoulder, "It is only thanks to me you are not poisoned."

Cassivelaunus chuckled amiably to himself and shouted for some more mead. A woman brought two tankards full, and, as if it were a joke, he made her taste from both of them.

"She lives!" he laughed. "Tros, at the first sign of a bellyache call Fflur, who will give you stuff to make you vomit."

Tros laughed and drank quickly, for he was anxious to have more serious speech before Commius should arrive.

"Cæsar prepares a fleet and plans to sail for the coast of Britain before the equinox," he said abruptly.

Cassivelaunus stiffened himself.

"How many men can he muster?"

"Many. But he has not ships enough for all, and he must also hold down the Gauls, who hate him. I think he will come with two legions, and perhaps five hundred cavalry."

"I laugh!" said Cassivelaunus. "I will gather dogs enough to worry his two

legions! Nay, the sheep shall chase him out of Britain!"

"Your lips laugh," said Tros, "but your eyes are thoughtful. My face is sober, but I laugh within. A deep plan pleases me. You have ships, but how big are they? And have you sailors for them?"

"I have three longships," said Cassivelaunus, "that are rowed by twenty men, and each can carry fifty. Now and then they go a-fishing, so the crews are always ready. But do you think I will fight Cæsar on the sea? Not I! I went to sea once, as far as Gaul, and I vomited worse than Fflur makes me when she thinks I have been poisoned! I will fight Cæsar on dry land!"

"Where Cæsar will defeat you unless heaven intervenes!" said Tros grimly. "However, you could not fight Cæsar with three ships. Where are the ships?"

"In the river*, by the marsh edge, well hidden from the North Sea rovers."

"Could you send those ships, unknown to anyone but you, around the coast, to a point that you and I will choose as the most dangerous landingplace for Cæsar, and hide them near-by at my disposal?"

Cassivelaunus nodded, but the nod was noncommittal, not a promise.

"It is a long way by sea," he said slowly, as if he doubted that such a plan was feasible.

"Because, if you will do that," said Tros, "and if the crews of your three ships obey me, I believe I can wreck the whole of Cæsar's fleet and leave him at your mercy on the beach with his two legions. I can do it! I can do it! If I can only find a man who knows the tides."

"Ah!"

Cassivelaunus sat bolt upright. Then he summoned his wife with a shout that made the dogs wake up and bark. She came and sat down on the seat beside him, her jewels gleaming in the firelight, but not more brilliantly than her eyes.

"I like this man. I like his speech," said Cassivelaunus.

"He is good," said Fflur, looking straight at Tros. "But he will not obey you. He has the eyes of a druid and a brow that is harder than bronze. He will never be a king, because none can serve themselves and make him take the blame. Nor will he ever be a slave, for none can tame him.

"He is like the wind that blows; if he blows your way, you may use him. He will tell no lies. He never thinks of treachery. But if he blows away from you, you can neither hold him nor call him back."

"So, Tros, now you know yourself," said Cassivelaunus. "Fflur is always right."

Tros smiled, his lion's eyes half closing.

"I would like to know what she says of Commius," he answered.

"She says that he will certainly betray me."

"If you let him," Fflur added.

"Mother of my sons, I will not let him!"

Tros smiled within himself and Fflur saw the change in his expression. She was very lovely when her gray eyes shone with hidden laughter. Suddenly, as if ashamed of a moment's mood, she put an arm around her husband's shoulder and nestled close to him.

"What was it I should hear?" she asked.

Tros repeated what he had said to Cassivelaunus about the ships, and Fflur listened with her eyes closed. Her husband signaled to Tros to wait in silence for her answer. She sat quite still, with her head against the woodwork, hardly breathing.

"I see blood," she said at last, shuddering. She was not seeing with her eyes, for they were shut. "I see men slain—and doubts—and a disaster. But there is brightness at the farther side of it, and a year, or longer, but I think a year—and then more blood; and I do not quite see the end of that.

"There is another way than this one you propose, but it would lead to failure because of rivalry. This way is the best, because it gives the victor's crown to no men, yet it will succeed. But you——"

She opened her eyes slowly and looked straight at Tros.

"You will suffer. You will not return to Samothrace, although you will attempt it. In a way you will be a king, yet not a king, and not on land. More than one woman shall bless the day that you were born, and more than one woman shall hate you; and those who love you will come very near to causing your destruction, whereas those who hate will serve your ends, though you will suffer much at their hands."

Conops stirred by the hearthside, prodding the fire with a charred stick, seeming to thrust at pictures that he saw within the

* The Thames—which was always *the* river.

embers. That was the only sound, until Cassivelaunus spoke:

"I envy no man who shall have a kingdom, that is not a kingdom, on the sea. Fflur is always right. If you should suffer too much, Tros, Fflur shall find you a way of relief. I am your friend, and you are welcome."

"After a while he will go away, and he will not come back," said Fflur.

CHAPTER V

A PRINCE OF HOSTS

THERE was a great shout at the gate and a thudding of hoofs on soft earth. The dogs awoke and barked with glaring eyes and their hair on end, as the other chariot brought Commius the Gaul. Some one struck the door three times with a sword-hilt and opened it.

In strode Commius with his cloak across the lower portion of his face, and paused a moment, blinking at the firelight. He seemed annoyed at the sight of Tros, but let his cloak fall and contrived to smile.

He was followed into the room by all the armed men who had been standing at the gate; they stacked their weapons in a corner after lifting their right hands one by one in salute to Cassivelaunus.

"So this is your palace?" said Commius, glancing about him and assuming admiration.

Cassivelaunus laughed.

"This is where we will eat and rest," he answered. "This belongs to Britomaris and Gwenhwyfar. Since they can not speak to me civilly, but pay me tribute nonetheless, they play the host from far off. They always go when I announce my coming. After I have gone, they say I stole the furniture! Yet they accept the gifts I leave. Be seated."

"Where *is* your palace?" Commius asked, taking the seat beside Tros after bowing with grave dignity.

"I have none," said Cassivelaunus. "I have a home that Fflur keeps, where I give judgment."

"Where?" asked Commius, but Cassivelaunus did not answer.

For excuse he found fault with the men, who were carrying in a long table and arranging it on trestles opposite the hearth. They worked clumsily, being evidently men of rank, not far below the chief himself in station, laughing when the women made fun of them.

When the table was set, and a heavy cloth laid on it, they dragged up a bench before the hearth and as many as could sat down on it, while the others sprawled on the floor between their legs.

Two of them were short and swarthy, but the others were tall, with long hair carefully combed and oiled; one man's hair was golden, and another's like spun flax. Not one but wore beautifully made brooches, and their arms were all covered with devices painted on with blue woad; they wore woolen breeches, and their legs were enclosed in leather stockings, crossgartered to the thigh. Clean men, all of them, and courteously dignified, but thirsty and not at all retiring.

"Mead!" they shouted. "Where is the mead?"

And the women brought it in great brimming tankards.

They pledged the health of Fflur and of Cassivelaunus; then, sending the tankards back to be refilled, they drank to Tros and to Commius, courteously wishing them a dozen sons apiece:

"Which will keep the good-wife busy," as one of them remarked.

"Aye," said another, "a childless woman is a restless curse, so drink we to the midwife! If there were a son or two to this house, Britomaris would have more reason to call his wife his own! Hah-hah-hah-hah! Guest Tros, they saw thee track Gwynhwyfar to the herdsman's house—so says the charioteer who just brought Commius. Does he lie? Nay, out with it! All know her."

"They know more than I, then," Tros answered, and Fflur glanced approval. "My man Conops here attended that tryst. Let him answer for me."

"He has but one eye! Hah-hah-hah! A dozen pairs of eyes can watch Gwynhwyfar, and she will give them all the slip! Ho! Cassivelaunus, what say you to it?"

"That you lack manners!" Cassivelaunus answered. "I can throw the man who insults my guest as far as from here to the paling. This is Tros, who broke the ribs of Erbin. If I give him leave, he can break thine."

"Oh, well, I will save my ribs for another purpose. Let him have Gwenhwyfar!

Whoever takes her from Britomaris does us all a service, for he will kill her very soon when he has found her out! And besides, without her Britomaris might become a man! Ho! I drink to the Lord Tros of the yellow eyes, who stole his shoulders from an oak tree, and who keeps a one-eyed servant lest the fellow see all that is happening in herdsmen's houses!"

"Ho-hah-hah-hah!" they chorused, and drank deep.

THE women had to leave off loading food on to the table, to fill up their tankards again, and they made so much noise that the children woke up and had to be bundled back to bed again behind a painted ox-hide curtain that cut off the far end of the room.

Then the meal was declared ready and they all fell to, Fflur sitting on the chief's right hand and Tros on his left hand, next to Commius, the other women serving and the dogs alert for bones or anything that anybody threw; for they cut the meat with their daggers, and tossed to the floor whatever they did not care to chew. There was a thunderstorm of growling underfoot and dog-fights most of the time, but no one took much notice, except to kick occasionally when the fighting was uncomfortably close.

There was bread, beef, mutton, pork, butter and cheese, onions, and a sort of cabbage boiled in milk, but no other vegetables. Conops received his food on a bench beside the hearth, and the women helped him to enough for three men. The Britons ate too steadfastly to do much talking, but Tros, possessing the Mediterranean temperament, had time for speech between the mouthfuls, and Commius had no appetite; so they exchanged words.

"Did Gwenhwyfar speak of me?" asked Commius.

"Aye, and of Cæsar."

A long pause, during which Tros listened to such sporadic conversation as passed between the Britons—mainly about horses and the scarcity of deer. One man, with his mouth full, urged Cassivelaunus to summon all the able-bodied men to a wolf hunt.

"I will lead you to a wolf hunt soon enough," said Cassivelaunus. "I will give you all your bellyfull of wolves."

Then:

"When do you return to Cæsar?" Commius asked.

"Soon," said Tros.

"You return with Caius Volusenus?"

"If he waits for me."

Cassivelaunus did not appear to catch that conversation, but Fflur was watching Commius intently, and it may have been that second-sight involved the corollary of second-hearing. She glanced at her husband, making no remark, but he read some sort of warning in her eyes and nodded, looking then steadily during three slow breaths at Commius, slightly lowering his eyelids and then twisting at his long mustache. Fflur appeared satisfied.

A moment later Cassivelaunus left the table, muttering something about seeing whether the serfs were being fed. He strode outside and slammed the door behind him.

"He is forever thinking of the serfs," said Fflur. "That is why he is a great chief and none can overthrow him. Some of you think more of horses than of men and more of hunting than of other people's rights. And some of you are very clever—she looked at Commius again—"but your chief is wiser than you all."

To please her, they began telling stories of Cassivelaunus, pledging him in tankards full of mead as they recalled incident after incident, adding those imaginative touches that time lends to the deeds of heroes until, if one had believed them, or even they had believed themselves, Cassivelaunus would have seemed not much less than divine. He was a long time absent, and the glamor of him grew each minute.

Commius took advantage of the roars of laughter—as one man told how the chief had trapped a Norseman's ship that came a-raiding up the Thames, and how he had killed the pirate and enslaved the crew—to resume a conversation in low tones with Tros.

"I pledge you to keep this secret," he began.

But Tros was a man who made no rash pledges, so he held his peace.

"Do you hear me?" asked Commius. "Cæsar has a high opinion of me, and I of you. I trust you. I am minded to warn Cæsar that he will prod a wasps' nest if he sails for Britain. I have seen and heard enough. I will advise against invasion."

Tros' amber eyes observed the Gaul's face thoughtfully. He nodded, saying nothing, and helped himself to gravy, mopping it up with bread from the dish in front of him.

Commius waited for another roar of laughter, and resumed:

"I must go in haste to Cæsar. One of us should stay here. If I could say to Cæsar I have left you here to watch events and to spy out the strength and weakness, he would excuse the haste of my return. If you permit me to return with Caius Volusenus in your place, I will use my influence to set your father free."

Tros kept silence, munching steadily. After a minute Commius nudged him, and their eyes met.

"You agree?" he asked. "I pledge myself to set your father free, and to warn Cæsar not to invade Britain."

"If you heard a man warn the winter not to come; and if you heard him promise to pull Cæsar's teeth, how much of it would you believe?" asked Tros.

"Then you prefer not to trust me?"

"Oh, I trust you. A man *is* what he is. I trust you to work for Commius as beavers work to dam a stream! But if I should trust you with my father's life, I should be a worse fool than even you suppose."

Commius' face darkened.

"I have influence with Cæsar," he said grimly.

"And I none." Tros answered. "Yet I will play a bolder hand than yours against him. Each to his own way, Commius!"

"Remember, I pledged you to secrecy!" the Gaul retorted.

"Hah! When you have my pledge, you may depend on me." said Tros. "My tongue is mine!"

Commius' eyes glittered coldly.

"I have seen men with their tongues torn out for saying less than you have said," he answered.

CASSIVELAUNUS entered, standing for a moment with the moonlight at his back, until they yelled to him to shut the door and keep the bats out. He strode to the fire and threw a faggot on. His eyes looked full of laughter.

"Commius," he said, "I go North in the morning. Will you come with me?"

"I have a boil," said Commius. "It irks me to ride in chariots; and I would as soon die now as try to sit a horse before the boil is healed."

Cassivelaunus had to turn his back to hide some sort of emotion.

"You must be my guest then in my absence," he said over his shoulder.

"You are a prince of hosts." Commius answered, bowing and smiling leanly.

"Then when I return after two or three days, I will find you here?"

"By all means," said Commius.

There was a gleam of something like excitement in his eyes.

"You know this is Britomaris' house," Cassivelaunus went on. "I have sent word to him that I shall leave at dawn. He and his wife Gwenhwyfar will be here soon after daybreak.'"

Commius was breathing very slowly. Almost the only sound came from a dog that cracked a bone under the table.

"Is my meaning clear to you?" Cassivelaunus asked. "Britomaris pays me tribute, but is not my friend. You say you are my friend."

"Never doubt it. I am proud to be," said Commius.

"And you are my guest—here—wherever I may be. Britomaris will try to plot with you against me. Will you be for me, or for Britomaris—and Gwenhwyfar?"

"Over and above all laws is that of hospitality," said Commius without a moment's hesitation. "Even if my sympathy were not yours, as I think you know it is, I must nevertheless uphold you while I am your guest."

"Good," said Cassivelaunus, turning with his back to the hearth and his hands behind him, legs well apart to avoid a dog that had taken sanctuary between his feet to gnaw a bone in safety. "I call you all to witness how I trust our friend, Lord Commius. I bid you all to trust him in like manner—exactly in like manner."

Commius stood up and bowed, and the men who sat at table murmured his name politely, raising their tankards to drink to him. But their eyes were on their chief, although no sign that a stranger could have noticed passed between them. Two or three times Commius looked as if about to speak, but he thought better of it, and it was Tros who spoke next:

"I am weary. Do the Britons never sleep?"

"I had forgotten that!" said Cassivelaunus. "Aye, we had better sleep. Do we? We are the soundest sleepers this side of the grave! But Lud pity those who sleep a minute later than I do in the morning, for I will prod them out o' blanket with a spear point! So away with all the kitchen-stuff, and one last drink!"

The women cleared away the dishes and the cloth, but left the table, for two men needed that to sleep on. The others laid their blankets on benches and on the floor, quarreling a little as to who had precedence.

Tros received two huge blankets and a pillow from Fflur, who led him and Conops to an inner room, where she kissed him good night.

"Is your man with that one eye watchful?" she asked.

"Better than a dog!" said Tros.

"Bid him guard you against Commius. The Gaul will lie on the fireside seat in the outer room, but the others will sleep like dead men. I know murder when I see it in a man's eyes. Be sure he means to kill you one way or another. He believes you know too much about him."

"I fear no knife of his," said Tros.

"Yet you fear," she answered. "What is it?"

"I fear lest he will run to Caius Volusenus, and cross to Gaul, telling Cæsar I have joined with your husband. I fear for my father's life. Commius would sell me and my father, and another dozen like us, for a pat on the back from Cæsar."

"You need not fear," she answered. "Cassivelaunus is awake. Commius will not return to Gaul—not yet. But be on guard against his knife, if he ever suspects that we suspect him."

She spread Tros' bed for him with her own hands, and called to one of the women to bring a pile of fleeces for Conops, bidding him spread them before the door as soon as it was shut.

"So you may both sleep," she said, smiling, "and if one tries to open in the night he must awaken Conops. Can you shout loud?" she asked.

"Aye, like a sailor!" Conops assured her with a nod.

"Shout then, and at the first alarm; and if the intruder takes flight, go to sleep again. Let there be no slaying in my house."

CHAPTER VI

CONCERNING A BOIL AND COMMIUS

ALMOST the next that Tros knew, day was breaking through the shutter chinks and there was a great row in the outer room—shouts, oaths and laughter. Cassivelaunus was keeping his promise to rouse late sleepers with a spear point. Dog barks and the high-pitched laugh of children added to the din. The table upset with a crash. A dog yelped. Then there came a succession of grunts and thuds as one man after another was thrown, laughing and protesting, through the front door.

"Are we all awake?" cried Cassivelaunus. "Come and wrestle with me, Tros! Let us see if your back is stronger than I can break!"

So Tros rubbed the sleep out of his eyes, and went and wrestled with him on the dew-soaked grass before the door, two dozen men admiring; for the horse-grooms and the herdsmen came and looked on, laughing like lunatics and offering to bet their freedom on the British chief.

But neither had the best of it and they were locked in a grunting knot of arms and legs when Fflur came and summoned them to breakfast. Cassivelaunus' oldest son, aged thirteen, promised on his honor to break Tros' neck the moment he was old enough.

"Gods! But he will have to fight a man!" laughed Cassivelaunus, rubbing his woad-stained skin. "Yours is a neck worth breaking, Tros!"

They washed in tubs of water that the women set outside the door, combed their hair carefully, and went in to the business of eating, which was serious, devotional and too faithfully performed to allow much conversation. Commius, making notes on tablets, which he thrust cautiously into his bosom, was the last to the table and the first to use his mouth for anything but eating:

"You Britons," he said, "are you irreligious nowadays? In Gaul, our people all worship at sunrise. That is the first act of the day."

"Before strangers?" asked Cassivelaunus. "No wonder the Romans have subdued you."

"What can the observance of religion have to do with that?" asked Commius.

"All," said Cassivelaunus, "everything. If an enemy learns your thoughts, he is a

fool if he can't throw you down and pin you under him. Religion not kept secret is weakness. Tell me *my* thoughts, Commius!"

Tros chuckled. Commius assumed the vaguely pained look of a financier who discovers that someone knows as much as he does. Cassivelaunus studying him shrewdly between mouthfuls, which he washed down with beakers of warm milk, proceeded to amuse himself.

"You tell me you have a boil. Then I know where to kick you, don't I?"

"Would you kick your guest?" asked Commius.

"No," said Cassivelaunus, "and I would kill the man who did. But let us suppose you were my secret enemy; for I have met such men, who spoke me fair and did me evil when my back was turned. I say, let us suppose it.

"I am sure you are an honorable man, or Cæsar would not have trusted you to come and talk with me.

"Cæsar did not trust the Lord Tros, but held a hostage for him. Therefore I will not Tros behind me in this house, as I *will* leave leave you. I like Tros, but I am forced to wonder why Cæsar does not trust him. I will keep a watch on Tros until I choose to send him back to Cæsar.

"But let us suppose *you* were my secret enemy. I know you have a boil. What would be easier than to lance that boil for you, and to put a little gangrene on the knife? You see, two can play at being secret enemies!

"It is just so with religion, which is why the druids keep it secret, and why we practise it in secret, and why Cæsar hates the druids, and why I like them. Cæsar never conquered Gaul until he slew the druids first. He will never conquer me, because he does not know my thoughts. Tell me my true thoughts, Commius!"

But before Commius could answer, Fflur put a word in:

"Ah! But what if the boil were feigned?"

She did not look at Commius; she was putting salt on an enormous skillet-full of fried eggs that one of the women had brought for her inspection.

"If the boil were feigned," said Cassivelaunus, "Bah! What fool would pretend to have a boil? The truth would be too easy to discover. A dangerous man would pretend to have the toothache, or the belly-ache. We risk offending the honorable Commius if we carry such a theme too far. And by the way, Commius, shall I send for a druid to come and make you easier? They are very clever with their little knives."

"No," Commius answered. "It will burst soon of its own accord."

Followed boasting, with excruciating details, by a man who claimed that he had ridden from Cair Lunden all the way to Pevensey, with boils so bad that, although he was weak with pain, a horse could not throw him because he had stuck to the saddle.

And that naturally led to rival reminiscences, including one by Tros, concerning a man who grew such callouses from friction on a rower's bench that when he was ashore, running away from King Ptolemy's press-gang, six arrows stuck into him like feathers in a bird's tail without his even knowing it.

So breakfast broke up in a storm of anecdotes, not all of them polite, and Commius was able to avoid attention to himself by simply keeping silence.

Then there was a clatter of hoofs and wheels outside and a dozen serfs entered to carry out the bedding and other luggage, while Cassivelaunus and his friends went outside to inspect the horses.

There were ten magnificent gray and white teams yoked to chariots, whose sides were built of wickerwork and wheels of bronze; and there were twelve more horses for the escort, mostly stallions, squealing and rearing with excitement.

Cassivelaunus mounted a gray stallion and put him through his paces while the luggage chariots were being loaded, exhibiting such horsemanship as made the seawise Tros gasp, until the owner of the horse complained that there would be no strength left in the animal and Cassivelaunus, jumping the horse over a chariot, vaulted to the ground beside him.

There was very little leavetaking from Commius, who stood in the door and bowed his pleasantest, pretending he was sorry not to make the journey with them. The only man he had much conversation with was Conops, to whom he gave a gold coin surreptitiously; but Conops, thanking him effusively, displayed it in his right palm so that Tros and the rest might see and draw their own conclusions.

Fflur did not kiss Commius, although from the hostess a kiss was customary.

Cassivelaunus shook him by the hand, signing to his wife and the children and the other women to make haste into the chariots. His last remark sounded almost like a warning:

"Remember, Commius; you are my guest. Britomaris and Gwenhwyfar pay me tribute. They are not my friends."

Then they were off, with Tros up beside Cassivelaunus and Conops on the floor, bracing his feet against the chariot's wicker sides that squeaked as Cassivelaunus wheeled the team and sent it headlong at the open gate, with dogs barking, serfs shouting, the rattle and thump of the other chariots wheeling into column one by one, and then the thunder of the hoofs of the escort kicking up the dust a hundred yards behind.

For a long while Cassivelaunus drove as if driving were life's one employment and speed the apex of desire, stooping to watch how the horses placed their feet. He never once glanced back at Fflur, who drove her own chariot with equal skill, her long hair flowing like a banner in the morning breeze and the heads of three children bobbing up and down beside her. At last he eased the pace a little and glanced at Tros sidewise, smiling:

"There will be fun with Commius," he remarked. "I like to see a fox caught in a trap. He will plot with Britomaris, who does exactly what Gwenhwyfar tells him, as long as she is there to *make* him do it. *That* will be treachery, he being *my* guest. Some men of mine, and a druid, will pick a quarrel with him. He having been my guest, they will spare his life. Alive, I can use him. He is no good dead. And they will spare Britomaris and Gwenhwyfar because I have so ordered it, for I can use them also.

"But they will fasten the fetters on Commius, and the druid will look for the boil, since it is his duty to attend to that. Finding none—the fool should have bethought him of a bellyache!—the druid will denounce him as a liar. We have failings, but there is this about us Britons: When we have proved a man a liar, we disbelieve whatever else he says. Thus the harm that Commius has done by too much talking when he thought my back was turned will be undone."

"I see you work craftily," Tros observed.

"A man *must*, if he proposes to remain a king," said Cassivelaunus. "Kingship is the first of all the crafts. This Cæsar who has conquered Gaul is bold and treacherous and fortunate and rather clever; but is he crafty?"

"Very," Tros answered. "If kinging it is a craft, he is the master craftsman of them all."

"Has he a Fflur?"

"No. Women are his tools, or an amusement."

"Then I will beat him!" said Cassivelaunus.

And at last he looked back at his wife, who laughed and waved a hand to him.

"You owe your life to Fflur," he remarked. "You sleep deep, friend Tros, and with the shutter off the thong—a a compliment to me, no doubt, but dangerous! Commius stirred three times. Twice he was at your window. He carries poison with him, which he bought from a woman near the seashore where he landed when he first came. One drop on a man's lips in the night——"

"Who watched him?"

"Fflur heard him and she roused me. So it happened there were two kings at your window in the night—and twice!—each lying to the other as to how he came to be there! We agreed that from that spot there was the best view of the moon's eclipse, and that the cry of a strange nightbird had awakened both of us."

"There is no reason why Commius should fear me," said Tros. "I am not *his* enemy."

"There is no reason why Gwenhwyfar should fear me, and I am not *her* enemy," Cassivelaunus answered. "But, man or woman, it is all one when they plan treachery. They are like a wolf then. None can say *why* they pursue this victim and not that one.

"But perhaps it would have suited Commius to have it said that *I* poisoned you. You were sent by Cæsar, Tros. Thus Cæsar would have a plausible excuse for quarrel with me. But let us hear what the one-eyed fellow says."

Conops exhibited the gold coin, tossed it in air and missed it as the chariot bumped over a hillock. They had to stop to let him recover it, and the escort galloped up full pelt to find out what was wrong.

"He said," Conops remarked when they were under weigh again, and he had spat on the coin and polished it, "he said, if I should remember to tell him at the earliest

moment all that is said and all that is done while my master is out of his sight, he for his part will remember to advance my cause with Cæsar, who has many lucrative employments in his gift."

Tros laughed. Cassivelaunus glanced down at Conops half-a-dozen times.

"I will buy that man from you," he said at last. "How much in gold will you take for him? Or shall I swap you three for one?"

"He is a free man," Tros answered.

"Oh. Then I would kill him if he offered to change masters."

CASSIVELAUNUS lapsed into one of his silent moods, merely waving with his arm occasionally as they skirted mud-and-wattle hamlets, beautifully built, invariably fenced about with heavy tree-trunks, clean and prosperous, but containing no stone buildings and no other roofs than thatch.

There were sheep and cattle everywhere, and great numbers of horses, all carefully watched and guarded against wolves by herdsmen armed with spears; but there was surprizingly little grain, or stubble to show where grain had been, and such as there was, was fenced as heavily as the villages.

The main road seemed to avoid the hamlets purposely, but here and there the villagers seemed to have repaired it, and wherever there was much mud it was rendered passable by tree trunks felled across it. There were no bridges whatever, but the fords were good and were evidently kept in order.

They changed horses at a village that Cassivelaunus called a town, where a hundred armed men, very variously dressed, lined up to salute the chief in front of a big thatched house with painted mud walls. They saluted him more or less as an equal, calling him and Fflur by their names and gathering around the chariots when the formal shouting with their spears in air was finished.

The man who owned the house was a long, lean, fox-haired veteran with a naked breast covered with woad designs, whose wife was young enough to be his daughter. But she knew how to play the hostess and to command the village women, who brought out bread and meat and mead for every one, turning the half-hour wait into a picnic.

They all seemed much more impressed with Tros than with Cassivelaunus and wanted to know whether he was one of Cæsar's generals or an ambassador.

But Cassivelaunus warned Tros to keep silence, so he pretended not to understand their speech; instead of talking, he and Conops kissed the girls who carried mead to them, and that started a kissing riot that kept everybody busy, while Cassivelaunus talked in undertones with the red-haired man and the group that stood about him leaning on their spears.

Then Cassivelaunus mounted the rehorsed chariot and addressed the crowd, standing very splendidly and making his voice ring until even the giggling girls grew silent and the children gaped at him.

"Cæsar will not come yet; but he will surely come!" he told them. "Get ye to work and harvest all the corn. Make double store of dried meat. Increase the sheaves of arrows. Mend the chariots, and let no blacksmith put on fat in idleness!

"When the invader comes there shall be a sudden call to arms, but until then he who wastes time leaning on his spear is a traitor to his wife and children! When Cæsar comes, he will lay waste the land, as he has laid all Gaul waste; he feeds his horses in the standing corn and burns what he does not need. So get ye the harvest in! It will be time enough to lean on spears when I send warning."

The man with red hair showed his teeth and leered with puckered eyes, but Cassivelaunus beckoned him and clapped him on the back, pulling him up into the chariot beside him, bidding him make friends with Tros "who knows Cæsar well."

"Tros, this is Figol, whose grandfather came like you from over the sea, although from another quarter. He is a better man than Britomaris, for he looks like a lean fox but he acts like a fat Briton, whereas Britomaris looks like a Briton but acts like a fox. Figol pays me tribute of all between this forest and where Britomaris' land begins; and the old fox doesn't cheat me more than I permit for the sake of his young wife!"

With that he lifted Figol with one arm and hoisted him over the chariot-side into the crowd, waving him a merry good-by, and was off almost before Conops could scramble into the chariot. They plunged into a forest at the outskirts of the village and drove amid gloomy oaks for leagues on

end, with clearings here and there, and well used tracks at intervals on either hand that evidently led to villages.

Cassivelaunus had lapsed into silence again, for a long time studying the new team and then whistling to himself. He seemed to think he was alone, until suddenly he turned to Tros and grinned at him.

"Figol is a fox, but I out-fox him!" he remarked. "If I had let him keep a hundred men at hand, he would have dared me to come and fetch the tribute that is nine months in arrear! He would have talked to them against me, instead of making ready against Cæsar. But now they will get the harvest in, and when they have it I will have my share! We will deal with Cæsar when the time comes."

"When Cæsar does come, you will find he has made all ready in advance," said Tros.

"This is a good kingdom," said Cassivelaunus. "Let Cæsar come, and he shall have a bellyfull of fighting for it! But if I should raise an army too soon, they would grow tired of waiting; and first they would race the horses on the downs, and then they would drink all the mead, carousing through the night.

"And after that, because there was no more mead, they would say I was mistaken about Cæsar. Whereafter they would laugh a great deal, and they would all go home. I know my Britons. And when Cæsar came there would be no army.

"Someday you shall see my town Cair Lunden, and when you have stayed there a while you will understand how crafty a king must be, if he is to earn—and also get—the tribute money."

"Crafty!" said Tros. "Are you crafty enough to trust me to tell Cæsar that if he comes soon, with a small force, he will find you unprepared?"

"Fflur trusts you. *She* knows," Cassivelaunus answered. "I never knew her to be wrong in the matter of trusting a man."

CHAPTER VII

GOBHAN AND THE TIDES

THE sun had crossed the meridian about two hours before and they were still cantering through lush, green forest when Tros smelled tidewater and nudged Conops, who smelled it too and grinned. Four of the escort had been cantering behind them for an hour, screening the view down the track to the rear, and it was not until the horsemen maneuvered into single file to avoid a mud hole that Tros knew the other chariots were missing. When he asked where they had disappeared to, Cassivelaunus merely motioned toward the northwest and said:

"Home. Cair Lunden."

"And we?"

"I will show you the longships."

But first they met Gobhan, in a house of logs and mud that overlooked long marshes where the snipe swarmed between the forest and the river Thames. In places the forest crept down almost to the water's edge; and there were creeks innumerable, crowded with wildfowl that filled the air with mournful longshore music. There was another huge forest on the far side, more than two miles away. The river rolled between the mud-flats, lonely and immense, with only one small boat in sight, working its way with oars and sail across the tide.

"Our weakness!" said Cassivelaunus, pulling up the team where the trees ended and they could see the vast expanse of river. "If Cæsar only knew this river he could sail up with his hundred ships and have us at his mercy! The Northmen come now and then, which is why we hide our ships."

There they left the chariot, with the horses nibbling at the trees, and walked, all seven in single file with Cassivelaunus leading, toward the mud-and-log house in the foreground, that stood with its front door almost in the marsh. There was smoke rising from a hole in the wooden roof, but no sign of an inhabitant until they reached the front by a narrow footpath, and Cassivelaunus shouted:

"Gobhan! Come out there, Gobhan!"

Almost instantly a face showed through the door that made Tros want to laugh, but that rather frightened the four members of the escort. It was comical, and yet immensely dignified, without a single feature that explained the dignity, old beyond calculation, toothless, nearly bald—there was a forehead that mounted so high it resembled a waxen skullcap with a gray-haired tassel on the top—and bearded, but with the beard enclosed in a leather bag and tied back behind the ears. The nose

nearly met the chin. There were no eyebrows; a pair of lashless eyes as bright as a weazel's peeped alert and inquisitive from sunken sockets.

"What do you want?" the face asked, mumbling the words because of toothlessness.

Then a body followed the face; lean, scrawny, twisted, suffering apparently from ague caught from the marsh. He was dressed in a long brown smock with a leather apron over it and nothing to proclaim his rank in life except a plaited woolen girdle such as druids wore. He showed no respect for Cassivelaunus, but stood and looked at him, his hands shaking, his hollow cheeks moving as he worked his gums.

"Such a host you are, Gobhan! Such welcome you offer us! Such courtesy!" said Cassivelaunus, striking an attitude.

The ancient addressed as Gobhan grinned at last—if it *was* a grin that quaked among the wrinkles. He muttered something, shrugged his boney shoulders, turned, and led the way into the house. Cassivelaunus strode in after him and Tros followed; Conops would have followed Tros through a furnace door, whatever his private feelings; but the escort withdrew toward the chariot, expressing strange emotions.

"Wizard!" was a word that one man used; and another one said something about "dirty magic and abominations."

THE interior of the house—it had only one room—was almost as remarkable as its owner. There were two truckle-beds at one end, with a table between them and two stools, but the whole of the rest of the interior was given up to furnaces and clay retorts, instruments for measuring, benches piled with jars, mortars, ladles and a work-bench down the middle of the room on which were appliances whose object Tros could not guess. The room was not exactly in confusion, but there was hardly standing room for the three who did not belong there.

Over in a corner a blind man clothed in skins plied an enormous bellows steadily, as if he did it in his sleep. There was the roar of a charcoal furnace and the stench of heated metal, but no sign of anything being made, although there were an anvil and great tongs and hammers near the door.

The owner of the place made no remark but simply waited in front of Cassivelaunus, holding his apron to keep his hands from shaking and constantly moving his toothless gums. He seemed neither afraid, nor yet pleased to see his visitors.

"So now you see Gobhan," said Cassivelaunus. "Look at him! My people wanted to roast him alive in his own furnace for wizardry; but I said no to it; for one reason and another, although it cost me quite a quarrel with the younger druids, who proclaimed him an outlaw from their mysteries, which I daresay is more or less true. And there is trouble now and then because the Northmen come to him, and he will not see the difference between a Briton and a foreigner, but teaches anything he knows to any one who asks him.

"If the druids know more than *he* does, I will say this: They conceal it! I never could have saved him, if I hadn't thought of using him to trap a longship full of Northmen, who sailed up the Thames to plunder Lunden.

"I sent a man to fall into their hands and tell them about Gobhan; so they turned aside to steal him, meaning to take him to their own country to teach the trick of metal to their shipwrights. And I caught them there, yonder where the creek flows through the rushes.

"We drew a chain across the creek behind them, and they burned their own ship rather than let us capture it, cattle and all; the forehold of the ship was full of bulls. It took three to kill the last man; never were such fighters! I would have saved him; I would have given him a wife and let him live in Lunden; but I could not reach his side before they ran a spear under his armpit and drowned him. He was fighting waist-deep when he fell.

"Northmen are thieves, and they come a-roving summer or winter, whenever they're least expected; but the fault I find with them is wearing armor, which is not the way a man should fight. We Britons fight nearly naked not esteeming cowardice.

"You have brought me a long way to see Gobhan!" Tros interrupted drily.

"Aye, I was coming to that. You spoke of Cæsar's fleet, you remember. Now Gobhan owes his life to me. If you can understand that noise he makes between his gums, he shall tell you things that Cæsar does not know. Gobhan knows the Book of Domnu*.

*The very ancient sea-god of the Britons.

"Does he understand the tides?" asked Tros, nudging Conops.

In Samothrace, where *he* came from, they knew more of "Domnu" and the inner meanings of the word than any druid did.

"Tides, full moons and the weather—he knows it all," said Cassivelaunus. "Make shift to understand his yammerings, and I will send him south for you in one of the longships. He shall lie in wait at Hythe."

"There are strange tides around this island," said Tros, observing Gobhan closely.

"Aye," said Cassivelaunus. "Our tides puzzle the Northmen badly. And the worst of it is, that this old wizard teaches them as readily as he teaches us, when they can find him! He has no discretion. I have often wondered why I did not let my people burn him."

"Let me talk with him," said Tros, beckoning the old man.

Together they went and sat on logs upended near the furnace, where Tros could draw patterns with his finger in the charcoal-dust on the floor. Cassivelaunus stood and watched them, with his legs astride and hands behind his back.

The only light in that corner came from the door and in a red glow from the charcoal furnace that the bellows-man was tending. Tros' eyes glowed like a lion's, but the most of his bulk was lost in shadow, as his finger roughly traced an outline of the shore of Kent and the coast of Gaul with the narrow sea between.

The old man wiped it out and drew a better one, and for a long while Tros studied that, until at last he laid a finger on the spot where he supposed the quicksands in midchannel lay*. At that Gobhan nodded and looked strangely pleased. The ague left him. He began to grow excited.

Mumble-mumble—Tros could hardly understand a word of it, until Gobhan prodded the blind old bellows-man with a long stick. Then the purring roar of the furnace ceased and the blind man sat beside them to interpret the toothless noises into more or less intelligible speech.

The blind man seemed to know as much as Gobhan did about the tides and winds and weather; as the two of them became aware of Tros' inborn understanding of the sea, they vied in their enthusiasm to explain to him, clutching him, striking each other's wrists, interrupting each other, croaking and squeaking like a pair of rusty-throated parrots, answering his questions both at once and abusing each other when he failed to understand exactly—Cassivelaunus smiling all the while as if he watched a dog-fight.

Sun and moon—there was interminable talk about them. Gobhan suddenly wiped out the channel map and drew a diagram of sun and moon and earth, with circles to describe their courses.

But the blind man did not need the diagram to argue from; he used his two fists for earth and moon, and Gobhan's head to represent the sun, gesticulating with his foot to show the action of the tides as their positions changed.

Once in his excitement he would have burned himself by getting too close to the furnace, but Gobhan hurled him away, and the argument resumed with both men kneeling as if they were throwing dice, and Tros' heavy face, chin on hand, two feet from theirs as he leaned forward studying first one and then the other, then the diagrams that Gobhan traced and the blind man kept on wiping out because he could not see, and did not need them.

At last Gobhan struck the blind man into silence and sat still with his eyes shut, counting days and hours, checking them off on his fingers; and by that time it was the blind man who appeared to have the ague, for he was sweating and trembling with irrepressible excitement. Gobhan on the other hand had grown as calm as if he were saying prayers.

"Mumble-mumble."

"Eight days," interrupted the blind man. Gobhan nodded.

Tros rose, facing Cassivelaunus.

"What present shall I make?" he asked.

"None," said Cassivelaunus. "If you give them money they will have no further use for you. And as for their needs, they eat at my cost. Have you learned what you came for?"

"Aye, and more," said Tros.

"I will send them both to Hythe to await you there, in the harbor with the three ships," said Cassivelaunus.

And then Conops entered; he had slunk out to explore the marsh, and came back with slime up to his knees, resheathing the long knife in the red sash at his waist.

"Master, I have seen the ships. They are no good," he remarked in Greek. "They

*The Goodwins.

are too long for their beam, too high at bow and stern to steer in a breeze; and they would swallow a quartering sea and lie down under it as a Briton swallows mead, or my name isn't Conops!"

"That is *their* affair," said Tros.

"They are leaky," Conops insisted. "Their seams are as open as the gratings on a prison window. I vow I could stick my fingers in! I would as soon put to sea in an orange-basket. Some of the cordage is made of wool, and some of leather! Some of it is good flax, but you never saw such patchwork!"

The blind man returned to his bellows. Gobhan peered into a clay crucible that was set in the charcoal furnace, shaking again with ague and not pleased, because the crucible had cooled. Both of them appeared to have forgotten Tros, and they took no notice whatever of Cassivelaunus, who beckoned to Tros to come out and see the three longships.

THEY lay berthed in the mud up a creek well concealed from the river by a bank of rushes. There were branches fastened to their masts to render them invisible against the trees. They were very small, but not ill-built, and they were much more seaworthy than Conops made them out to be.

The woolen cordage Conops had described turned out to be the lashings that held in place the tent-cloth with which they were covered, but it was true they were moored with horse-hide warps made fast to the nearest trees. Nor were they very leaky; they were well tarred, and a day's work on their seams by half a dozen men would make them fit for sea.

"Where are the crews?" asked Tros.

"Doubtless carousing!" said Cassivelaunus. "It needs a month to sober them when they have beaten off a North Sea rover. Three weeks gone, the three of them together sunk a longship down at Thamesmouth, and I paid them well for it."

"There is need for haste," said Tros.

"There shall be haste! I will promise them another big reward. And there will be Gobhan with them, whom they fear a great deal more than they fear me—for they who follow the sea are bigger fools than they who live on land!

"I will say that if they fail to reach Hythe and if they fail to obey you, Gobhan shall turn them all into fish. They will believe that, and they are too familiar with fish to wish to grow scales and fins! The rest is for you to contrive."

"Very well," said Tros. "Understand me: I do not know what the gods will have to say about all this. The gods prevent many things that men design; but I think the gods are not in league with Cæsar. Unless Cæsar's cold heart changes, I am likely to be pilot when he sets sail for the coasts of Britain.

"I will lead him to the high cliffs that are nearest to the coast of Gaul, and if it may be, I will wreck him on the quicksands in mid-channel. I will surely do that if I understand the tides aright and if the wind should favor.

"In that case, you and I will never meet again, because, of all the certainties the surest is, that if I set Cæsar on the quicksands he will slay me. And we may miss the quicksands; or Cæsar's men may see the water boiling over them and steer clear.

"So watch for his fleet, and be ready with an army to oppose his landing. And if he succeeds in landing, count on me nevertheless, provided you are sure that Gobhan and these three ships are safe in Hythe, and that the crews will obey me when I come."

"Tros!" said Cassivelaunus, and seized him by the right hand.

Their eyes met for the space of seven steady breaths.

Then the Chief spoke again:

"You are a man. But I do not know yet why you do this."

"I have not yet done it!" Tros answered.

"Nevertheless, in my heart I know you will attempt it. Why? What am I to you? And what is Britain to you?"

"What is fire to water?" Tros answered. "One stream serves as well as the next when it comes to checking forest fires. If you were invading Cæsar's rightful heritage, then I would side with him against you! I am a free man, Cassivelaunus. A free man mocks himself, who sits in idleness while Cæsars burn up freedom!"

"I see you are not a man to whom I may offer a reward," said Cassivelaunus, gripping his hand again. "But I am your friend, Tros; Fflur is also your friend."

"I am glad of it," Tros answered. "But be careful not to judge too hastily, for thus far we have only dealt in words. And next,

I must trade words with Cæsar, who values nothing except deeds that glorify him. Remember: I will tell Cæsar that if he comes swiftly with a small force he will catch you unprepared. First then, prove me a false prophet and a liar! Then call me friend—if both of us deserve it—when we meet again!"

CHAPTER VIII

AN INTERVIEW NEAR A DRUID'S CAVE

TROS drove back in the night, with a purse of gold at his waist that Cassivelaunus gave him for expenses, in a chariot horsed with four of the finest stallions Britain could produce, driven by a long-haired charioteer whose pride was that no chariot had ever overtaken him since he had been made chief's messenger.

They were followed by a dozen riders, partly for protection from the wolves that bayed in the forests all night long, but equally for the important business of compelling wayside autocrats to furnish fresh teams when required and to provide their best, instead of leading out old, lame horses.

Even so, because of a bent bronze chariot-wheel, that caught between two sunken tree trunks in a dark ford, and the time it took to find and awaken a blacksmith, and the time he took to get the wheel hot, straighten and replace it, the sun was up an hour before they came to Britomaris' house, where the charioteer shouted for a fresh team.

There was a rabble of men and women in the yard, and of all sorts, light- and dark-skinned, tall and stocky, some so dwarfish as to seem deformed. And they were not disposed to make way for the chariot, or to bring out horses at the charioteer's command.

Some one shouted for Britomaris; but it was Gwenhwyfar who came to the door and stood looking at Tros long and sullenly before she spoke.

"You? You dare to come here?" she said at last, curling her lip and glowering under lowered eyelids.

"Horses!" roared the charioteer, but she acted as if she had not heard him, and the mounted men rode off to the stables to help themselves.

"Look!" said Gwenhwyfar, pointing. "These are my people. They have come to see the shame you brought on Britomaris, and on me! Dog—that have slept in my house and betrayed me to Cassivelaunus! Dog—that are servant of Cæsar and false to Cæsar, too! Insolent dog—with the eyes of a druid, the teeth of a wolf and the breath and the speech of a viper!"

There was none, now the escort were gone, except Conops, crouching in the chariot, to protect Tros from violence. Conops loosed his long knife, for the crowd looked ugly, and the charioteer felt at the reins to get the stallions on their toes—ready to wheel them and charge through the crowd at a moment's warning.

"Draw your sword, master!" Conops whispered.

But Tros touched him on the back to calm him.

"Where is Commius?" he asked.

"Aye! Where is Commius! He was my guest. Who betrayed him?"

Gwenhwyfar sneered and tossed the hair out of her eyes.

"Commius, who was your friend! Commius, who ate at the same table with you in this, my house! Commius, who slept under my roof! Where is Commius, whom you betrayed!"

"I asked, where is he!" Tros had a voice like rolling thunder when the mood was on him.

Gwenhwyfar looked startled, but her eyes glared defiance.

"Go ask the druids! Go! You shall eat no more in my house! Drive him forth, men! Drive him!"

She threw out both arms in a gesture that condemned him to mob mercy, and the crowd hardly hesitated. Some one threw a javelin, that missed and stuck quivering in the house wall; and before the twang of that ceased Tros was almost off his feet from the sudden jerk as the charioteer wheeled his team and sent it headlong at the crowd. There were no scythes in the sockets on the axles, or he would have mowed a dozen of them.

"Kill him!" screamed Gwenhwyfar.

But the words froze on her lips; for the escort arrived on the scene from behind the house, charging with lowered spears, riding fresh, corn-fed, frantic horses they had seized.

There was none killed; the crowd scattered and ran, those who had weapons

throwing them away; but many were knocked down, and some were soundly thumped with spear butts.

The charioteer laughed and wheeled the team around again to face the door, while four of the escort went to bring a fresh team for the chariot. They were laughing, and not in the least annoyed by the disturbance; two of the remaining escort chaffed Gwenhwyfar mercilessly, calling her "Cassivelaunus' scornling," but she ignored them as if they were a mile away. Her whole hatred was aimed at Tros, concentrated on him, glaring, venomous.

"Do you love your father as you love your friends?" she asked.

But Tros, listening with both ears, pretended to be careful how they changed the team.

"Drive fast!" she mocked. "Aye, drive like the wind! You shall not reach Gaul before your father dies! Cæsar will avenge me! Cæsar will draw blood in exchange for Commius! Hurry, before the crows leave nothing you can recognize!"

Tros' face showed no emotion, but his grip on Conops' shoulder told another tale. The one-eyed sailor winced, and tried to loosen the grip with cautious fingers.

"Who knows where Commius is? I will speak with him," said Tros; and one of the escort seized a man who tried to slink away around the corner of the house.

Backed against the wall and held there with a spear point at his throat, the man soon gave his information and was let go. The four fresh horses were yoked by that time.

And at last Tros spoke to Gwenhwyfar:

"Gwenhwyfar, wife of Britomaris, you will fall to Cæsar yet! Cæsar will treat you less kindly than I did. You may offer him ten kingdoms, and yourself thrown in, but I see you walking through the streets of Rome at Cæsar's chariot tail; and, if by then you are not too worn from weeping, and too sore footed, and too thin, there will be an auction afterward.

"Rome stinks, Gwenhwyfar! You will miss the sweet earth smell of Britain, and the freedom, and the green oaks and the thick turf underfoot! Rome's streets are hard, and her heart is harder. But harder than all—aye, harder than that heart of yours—is Cæsar's! Farewell!"

He bowed to her as the chariot wheeled away, and the men of the escort paid her scurvy compliments; but she stood still, leaning back against the doorpost with her head erect, glaring her anger until the chariot and its escort were lost to view.

"Lonely she looks, and I am sorry for her, for she will be lonelier still if ever she meets Cæsar," Tros said to Conops.

BUT she had friends; for as they galloped by the corner of the wall that shut the house from view, a stone hurled by an unseen hand missed Tros by so little that he almost felt the weight of it, and it broke the tough turf where it landed.

"But, master—your father!" Conops was clenching and unclenching his fingers. "Has she sent a messenger to Cæsar? Has she betrayed us?" Conops clutched his knife and spoke to Tros between thin, vindictive lips. "If your father is slain, my master, I will beg one favor of you: Let me live that I may bury this in her!"

He showed six inches of his knife-blade.

"I think she lied," said Tros.

But his voice betrayed him. He did not think that. He knew she spoke the truth; he knew some messenger had gone to inform Cæsar what had happened to Commius the Gaul, along with, doubtless, a long story about himself. His blood ran cold. He knew how much mercy his father would receive from Cæsar when that sort of tale should reach the Roman's ears.

"There is room for things to happen between here and Gaul," he said after a minute. "It is one thing to send a messenger; another for the man to reach his goal. Moreover, Caius Volusenus has a fairly swift ship. We may arrive there first."

There was delay, though, before they resumed the ride to where Caius Volusenus waited for them. The escort led into the forest and then wheeled out of the fairway down a lane that bore no tracks of wheels, where they had to stop a time or two to lift the chariot over fallen trees, and the bronze wheels cut deeply into moss.

At the end of a mile or two of winding between ancient oaks, where the deer fled suddenly in front of them and rabbits scampered for the undergrowth, they entered a wide clearing. There a dewy hillside faced them, scattered with enormous stones; and in the midst of the hill there was a considerable clump of very ancient yew trees, with

a cave mouth just below that, its entrance arched with three adze-trimmed monoliths. Above the trees there was a cluster of neat, thatched dwellings.

Among the trees sat druids in their long robes, and one of them was the ancient who had held forth on the night when Tros first met Cassivelaunus.

The druids, led by the old one, came solemnly down the hillside and surrounded Tros' chariot. He greeted them, and the escort jumped down from their horses to show respect, yet it was a peculiarly masked respect; they looked as little interested as they could, perhaps because Tros was a stranger.

"Is Commius here? May I have word with him?" asked Tros when the greeting was all done; and the old man sent two younger druids to the cave.

They brought out Commius, with fetters on his wrists but not ill-treated otherwise. The Gaul's black-bearded face was set so as to mask emotion, and a lean smile hid whatever he might think of Tros. He nodded a curt greeting, holding his clasped hands in front of him to ease the bronze fetters' weight.

"Commius, I am on my way to Cæsar," said Tros.

The Gaul inclined his head slightly to signify that he had understood, but he said nothing; nor did he glance at the druids, or make any sign except that almost unnoticeable nod.

It was only by imagining himself in the Gaul's position that Tros realized there would be no conversation while the druids listened. But the druids also realized it. Almost before Tros could face about to beg their indulgence the oldest of them made a signal and they walked away in silence and sat down at a sufficient distance to be out of earshot.

"Now!" said Tros. "What shall I say of you to Cæsar?"

Commius smiled thinly.

"You will say of me to Cæsar what you wish to say, if he permits," he answered. "*My* message has already gone."

"Have you a message for your Gauls?" asked Tros.

"Yes. Bid the Atrebates obey Cæsar. Cæsar will avenge me."

The voice was cleverly controlled, but the expression of his face masked contempt too studiously for Tros not to see through it.

"You think you have contrived my downfall, Commius," he answered. "I doubt it. A man is hard to kill until his time comes. For my own part I am not a dealer in men's lives. I have sought you out to see what I can do to help you."

"Can you set me free?" asked Commius, and the sneer in his voice was biting; it brought the fire into Tros' amber eyes.

"You could set yourself free very easily if you were not a traitor to your race," he answered. "Commius, we are two fools, I because I did not know how wholly you are Cæsar's slave——"

The word stung; Commius' black eyes blazed at last. He almost answered, but controlled himself.

"— and you, because you think to promote your own ambition before you do your duty to the Gauls. You have eaten from Cæsar's hand. You like the food! But he will treat you as he does the other dogs in due time."

"Dogs?" snarled Commius, losing his control at last. "The dogs shall tear your carcass before you are twelve hours older!"

"So that is it! I thank you for the warning, Commius!"

Tros laughed and turned away, having learned what he came to learn. The druids, observing that the conference was over, came forward in a group, and the two who had brought Commius from the cave took charge of him again. Tros spoke to the oldest druid, greeting him respectfully:

"Lord Druid, before Commius became your prisoner, he sent a messenger toward the coast? Where would such a messenger be likely to lie in wait to slay me before taking ship?"

The old druid glanced at the escort, who were munching bread in a group beside their horses, having washed their hands and faces in the dew.

"My son, those horsemen will take care of you," he answered.

"But a messenger did go?"

"Aye, a man went, with a letter to Etair son of Etard. Gwenhwyfar wife of Britomaris wrote it. Etair is her half-brother, and his place lies near the seashore where you landed from the Roman ship. It was his men who attacked you when you landed."

Tros scratched his chin, grinning thoughtfully, and Conops went and stood where he could watch his master's face. Conops' only remedy for anything was that long

knife he carried in his sash, but he knew that Tros despised fighting if a craftier way might be found out of a difficulty. Craftiness is much more nervous work than fighting and Conops held his breath.

"If a druid might ride with me," said Tros at last, still scratching at his chin, "a druid who would lead me to a small seaworthy boat, whose owner would obey my orders——"

The old druid nodded and, turning his back on Tros, gave orders very swiftly in rumbling undertones. It was not clear why he did not wish Tros to hear what he said, unless it was the habit of keeping his own counsel and establishing a mystery whenever possible.

He had hardly finished speaking when the young druid, who had befriended Tros when he first landed, went and sat down in the chariot, tucking his long robe in under his feet.

Then the old High Druid dismissed Tros with one sentence:

"Caius Volusenus grows impatient because his ship lies close to a dangerous shore."

But he did not explain how he knew that. He held up his right hand in an act of invocation and boomed out words that sounded like a ritual, then gestured to Tros to be gone.

The escort mounted at once with an air of relief and began laughing and chattering; the charioteer preferred not to wait another second, but drove toward Tros, and the moment he and Conops had stepped in they were off at full gallop, returning down the same glade by which they had come.

"These druids," said Conops in Greek, thumbing his long knife for the scandalized druid's benefit, "are too much like specters from another world for me. They are not enough like honest men or criminals for me to trust them."

Tros smiled.

"Never mind," he answered. "I would trust *you* less if you should trust any man too much! Put your knife away!"

CHAPTER IX

TROS DISPLAYS HIS SEAMANSHIP AND A WAY OF HIS OWN OF MINDING HIS OWN BUSINESS

THE forest went down to the sea along the route that Tros took that morning; and because the druid ordered it they made a detour to the westward that brought them, near midday, to a swampy harbor hidden amid trees, not far from where the chalky downs begin that draw nearer to the shore south-eastward until they form the white cliffs of Kent.

"Hythe," said the druid, pointing to where roofs over a mud-and-wattle wall could be seen between wind-twisted branches.

The town was hidden from the sea; there were no signs of cultivation or of human dwellings that would be likely to tempt sea rovers into the reed-infested harbor mouth. There was not even an inhabitant in sight, although there were boats drawn up into the reeds, amid which narrow, winding paths led mazily toward the town wall. Gulls and other sea fowl by the thousand filled the air with harsh music, under a bright sky flaked with fleecy clouds.

"Hythe, a high tide, and the wind in the southwest!" said Tros, meditating. "How often does the wind set thus?"

"More often than not," said the druid. "It is the winds from the west that save this land from pirates. Northwest, west, southwest—most days in the year. The Northmen set forth, but three times out of five storms blow them back again." *

"And a fair slant for Gaul, but a rising sea," said Tros. "Caius Volusenus will be fretting at his anchor, if he has not gone away and left me."

They went and stood on the shingle beach, where the rounded stones sang sharply of the weight behind the waves and they could see, amid the white-caps in the distance to the eastward, a galley that pitched at her anchor and rolled until her heavy fighting top looked like a plaything of the spray.

"The Romans are the worst seamen I have yet seen," Tros remarked, screwing up his eyes to stare along the waves. "They think weight is strength, and pit their strength against the sea. They hang on by brute force, when a seaman would employ a little strategy to use the sea against itself.

"If Caius Volusenus were a seaman, he would not be lying off a lee shore until his crew was weak from vomiting. If he was any kind of man except a Roman soldier, he would have explored this shore-line, instead of waiting for me to bring information.

"But that is the Roman method: Seize a hostage, threaten him, then send his son

*Great Britain has always had the "weather-gage" of an invader.

or his brother to save the hostage's life by betraying some one else! And because the world is what it is, and men are what they are, the plan succeeds too often!

"But I have seen the Romans lose a fleet of ninety ships on the coast of Sicily, because a land-general ordered thus and so, and they knew no better than obey the fool! What is that group of men along the beach a mile away?"

The druid, peering under the palm of his hand, looked anxious but said nothing. It was clear enough that the men were forcing a small boat into the sea, and at the first attempt it overturned in the surf. They had to haul it back on the beach and bail the water out.

"Now that is a strange state of affairs," said Tros. "They look to me like Britons."

"They *are* Britons," said the druid.

"Don't they know this harbor? Can't they take a boat from here?"

The druid nodded, putting two and two together, frowning:

"You are too late, Tros! That will be the messenger whom Commius sent to Cæsar. They who are helping him to launch the boat belong to Etair son of Etard, who is against Cassivelaunus, whereas the men of Hythe are for him. They plan to reach Caius Volusenus' ship ahead of you. They will succeed, because it will take us too long to procure a crew. The men of Hythe are doubtless on the hills behind us, tending cattle and watching Caius Volu——"

The druid coughed, for Tros clapped him on the back so suddenly that he bit a word off midway.

"Quick!" said Tros. "Show me a boat with a sail!"

"But a crew?" said the druid.

"I have one!"

"Those horsemen? They can hunt deer; they can drink and sing and fight, but——"

"I said, I have *one!* He is enough! Make haste, man!"

THAT druid never hurried faster in his life. They found a boat within a quarter of an hour, whose sail had not been carried ashore and hidden. They found oars and a pole in another boat, and from a third boat lifted a dozen yards of good hemp rope with which to repair the running gear.

Tros said good-by to the escort, gave them all the gold out of Cassivelaunus' purse, and nearly broke the hand of one in his hurry to get the good-bys over and be gone. Then he kissed the druid on both cheeks, cried out to Conops to raise the sail and shoved the boat out from the reeds, jumping in as the keel slid free of the mud.

It was a strong boat, but awkward and as slow as a drifting log, although they labored at the oars like Titans.

But at last they worked their way over the bar at the harbor mouth and caught the southwest wind that laid her over until the gunwale was awash. Then Tros took the steering oar and made experiments to discover the best point of sailing, but he found her a clumsy tub at best.

Her blunt bow checked her constantly, and he had hard work to keep from being swamped by the rising sea. Conops was bailing half the time.

They had made a drenching, wallowing mile of it, and Caius Volusenus' ship seemed farther off than ever, her hull down out of sight between the waves or rising over a big one with her nose toward the sky, when Conops shouted, pointing shoreward:

"They have launched that other! They are giving chase!"

It was a faster boat and a bigger one, manned by half a dozen men, who had forced her through the surf at last and were following in Tros' wake. Her big square lug-sail bellied in the wind and lifted her along a good three yards for his two.

Rolling dangerously as the helm changed, she began to work to windward, not more than a quarter of a mile astern, two men with bows and arrows standing in her bow and a very big man in a bearskin coat leaning his weight against the steering oar.

"He is reckless—they have promised him a fat reward for our two heads!" said Tros.

"Master, make for the shore!" urged Conops. "They are too fast and too many for us!"

But Tros headed farther out to sea, edging his boat craftily to keep the quartering waves from swamping her. He lost a little speed by doing that, and Caius Volusenus' ship was still a good six miles away.

"The tortoise who runs, and the hare who fights, are equal fools!" he growled in Conops' ear.

But Conops drew his long knife nervously, returned it to its sheath and then drew out Tros' sword, examined its keen edge and drove it home again into the scabbard.

"We two against seven—and no arrows!" he said in a discouraged voice.

But Tros, making no remark, continued his experiments, discovering a trick the awkward hull possessed of falling away from the wind stern-first whenever he relieved the pressure from the oar. Nothing saved her then from swamping but the pressure of the wind that heeled her over and exposed more broadside to the waves—that, and instant skill at the helm.

As Tros eased her off from one of those experiments an arrow hummed into the sail and stuck there. "Take cover below the weather gunwale," he ordered; so Conops knelt, begging leave to take the oar and run the risk himself.

"For if you die, master, and I live, can I save your father?"

Tros paid no attention to him. He was watching the approaching boat and her crew out of the corner of his eye and considering the flight of three more arrows that winged their way into the sail. The pursuing boat was to windward now, nearly abeam, changing her course so as gradually to reduce the distance between them.

"They shoot across the wind, yet all the arrows find their way into the sail," he said at last. "That is not bad shooting. That is done on purpose. They propose to make us prisoners. Let them see you throw up your hands!"

"Master! We have had enough of being prisoners!"

"Obey!" commanded Tros.

So Conops stood, throwing his hands up, while Tros edged his boat cautiously toward the other, which turned at once and came downwind toward him.

"They are seven," he growled between his teeth, for he did not want it seen that he was talking. "Return your knife to its sheath, Conops! Four of them will jump aboard us. See! They stand ready in the bow. That leaves three for us to tackle. When I give the word, jump! I like their boat better than this one. Leave the big man in the bearskin coat, and that other, to me. Take you the fellow with the bow and arrows who kneels by the mast. Are you ready?"

AS HE spoke, a big sea lifted both boats, and in the trough that followed the man in the bearskin shouted, shoving his helm hard over. They rose together, side by side and almost bumping on the crest of the next wave and Tros suddenly let go the sheet, exactly at the moment when the four men in the other boat's bow jumped.

They had calculated on his veering away from them, if anything; but it was his stern that fell to leeward; his bow came up into the wind. They missed, the pitch and roll assisting Tros as he plied the helm.

Three sprawled into the water and the fourth just grasped the gunwale, where he clung until the two boats crashed together and the force of the collision shook him off.

The man in the bearskin roared an order, leaning his whole strength against the steering oar, but he was too late; the collision spilled the wind out of his sail and he shipped the top of a wave over his stern that almost swamped him.

Tros, calculating to a hair's breadth, had timed the turn so that his bow struck the stranger amidships and, continuing the swing, he let the other boat bear down on him until for a second they lay parallel and bumping, facing opposite directions.

"Jump!" he shouted then, and he and Conops sprang for the bigger boat, where the three men stood to receive them with drawn knives.

But each of them had to cling to something with one hand to preserve his balance because the boat was beam-on to the sea and wallowing, as the loose sail flapped and thundered.

Tros took his oar with him, and landed with the blade of it against a man's throat. He went backward overboard, and Conops' knife went home to the hilt into the third man, striking upward from below the ribs.

The man in the bearskin thrust at Tros, but stumbled over the dead man, who flopped and slid to and fro, bleeding in knee-deep water. So the blow missed, but the butt of Tros' oar did not; it struck the outthrust hand and spun the knife overside.

The fellow in the bearskin, shaking his hand because the blow had stung him, jumped in on Tros with a yell; but the boat lurched; and Tros had the better sea legs. Roaring to Conops to keep his knife away, he seized his opponent by the neck and slowly forced him backward overboard.

"Haul on the sheet!" he shouted then, jumping for the steering oar that swung and banged in its iron bracket. In a moment they were paying off before the wind, and the boat they had left was down between

the waves a hundred yards behind, half-full of water, sinking.

"Take that bucket and bail for your life!" Tros shouted, conning the rising sea as he headed up a bit toward the wind; for the tide set inshore and they had made a lot of leeway while the short fight lasted.

For a long time after that he made no remark, until Conops had bailed most of the water overside.

Then Conops, with his back toward Tros, searched his victim carefully and, finding nothing worth appropriating, picked him up and threw him into the sea to leeward. When he had seen the body sink he came and sat down by his master.

"Clean up the blood!" commanded Tros.

So Conops went to work again, using a piece of sail cloth that he found in a box under a coil of rope. Presently he returned, and resumed the seat.

"So now you have a dead man to account for," was all Tros said, sparing him one swift glance as they rose over a big wave.

Conops looked surprized, indignant, irritated. He had expected praise.

"It was him or me," he answered after a minute's pause.

"Well—you killed him. Can you give him back his life?" asked Tros.

"But, master, *you* killed two men!"

"Not I! I gave them leave to swim!" said Tros.

"They could not swim. They are all drowned, master."

"That is their affair. I never forbade them to learn to swim!"

"But that fellow clad in a bearskin—how could he have swum? His coat drowned him."

"He never asked my leave to wear that coat," said Tros. "I could have slain him with my sword as easily as you slew *your* man. But I spared him. I gave him leave to swim. No enemy of mine can hold me answerable for the bearskin coat he wears!"

"I am *glad* I slew," said Conops, glaring fiercely through his one eye.

"Laugh, if you wish," said Tros. "But a man should mind his own business. At some time or another, you will have that fellow's life to answer for which should have been *his* business and not yours."

Conops was silent for a long time.

"Well. At least you have stolen a boat," he said at last.

"So?" said Tros. "When, then? One I borrowed, by a druid's leave. This one I exchanged for that one; and who started the exchange? I tell you, Conops, you have nearly as much as Cæsar has to learn about the art of living! It is a coward's act to kill, if there is any other way."

"Then you call me a coward, master?"

"Yes," said Tros, "but not as bad a one as Cæsar; which, if you were, I would contrive to get along without you, instead of trying to teach you wisdom. Ease off the sheet a little—so—plenty. Now get forward and see whether Caius Volusenus signals us."

CHAPTER X

CAIUS JULIUS CÆSAR

TROS went about between two waves as he came nearly abreast of the plunging galley and, falling away before the wind as close to her side as he dared, shouted for a rope. But none was thrown to him. He had to work like fury at the steering oar, bump the galley's side and jump for it, thanking the clumsy shipwrights who had left good toe- and finger-hold.

For that galley had been thrown together by unwilling Gauls at Cæsar's order, very roughly in the Roman fashion under the eyes of Roman overseers, and had been rendered fit for sea by laying strips of wood to hold the caulking in the seams.

Tros and Conops clambered aboard and let the small boat drift away. There were seasick Romans lying everywhere—they all but stepped on two of them—but not a sign of Caius Volusenus.

Lemon-countenanced and weak from vomiting, a legionary summoned him at last. He came out of his cabin below the after fighting deck and propped himself weakly against the bulkhead—a middle-aged man, dignified and handsome even in that predicament, with his toga nearly blown off in the wind and his bare knees trembling. His eyes were a bit too close together to create instant confidence.

"How dare you keep me waiting all this while?" he grumbled, trying to make a weary voice vibrate with anger. "We might have lost the ship, plunging in this welter at a cable's end!"

"You will lose her yet!" said Tros; but his eye was up-wind, and he knew the wind was falling. "Have you a spar to make fast

to the cable? You had better let the anchor go and make sail as she turns before the wind."

Caius Volusenus doubted that advice, but Tros was in haste now to return to Cæsar, so he talked glibly of a lee shore and a gale, and pointed to the rocks where the tide would carry them.

One thing was certain—that the crew was much too weak and discouraged to haul the anchor up; so while Caius Volusenus and two young centurions aroused and bullied the crew into a semblance of activity, Tros and Conops lashed a spar to the cable-end and tossed it overboard.

Then, when Caius Volusenus gave the signal, they slipped the cable and the galley swung away before the wind with three reefs in her one great square-sail.

Tros took the helm and no man questioned him. It was not until they reached mid-channel and the wind fell almost to a calm that Caius Volusenus climbed up to the after deck and leaned there, yellow and weak kneed, resuming the command.

"Not for Cæsar—not even for Cæsar," he grumbled, "will I take charge of a ship again on this thrice cursed sea! He would not trust a crew of Gauls. He said they would overpower us Romans if a gale should make us seasick. Well, I would rather fight Gauls than vomit like a fool in Neptune's bosom. What news have you?"

"News for Cæsar," Tros answered.

"Speak!" commanded Caius Volusenus.

"No," said Tros. "You are a faithful soldier, I don't doubt; but you are not Cæsar."

Caius Volusenus scowled, but Tros knew better than to let his information reach Cæsar at second-hand, for then Caius Volusenus would receive the credit for it. He, Tros, needed all the credit he could get with Cæsar, and on more accounts than one.

"Well, there are two of you," said Caius Volusenus. "I will have them flog that man of yours, and see what *he* can tell me."

He stepped toward the break of the deck to give the order to a legionary who was standing watch beside the weather sheet.

"Better order them to row," said Tros. "There is not enough wind now to fill the sail. Flog Conops, and you injure me. Injure me, and I will fashion a tale for Cæsar that shall make you sorry for it. Hasten to Cæsar, and I will say what may be said in your behalf."

Caius Volusenus turned and faced him, his skin no longer quite so yellow since the wind had ceased.

There was an avaricious, hard look in his eyes, not quite accounted for by the ship's rolling over the ground-swell.

"Did you find pearls?" he demanded.

"Plenty," said Tros after a moment's thought.

"Have you any?"

"No. But I know how to come by them."

He thought another moment and then added:

"If I should return as Cæsar's pilot, and you, let us say, were to lend me a small boat in which to slip away by night, I could lay my hands on a good sized potfull of pearls, and I would give you half of them."

Caius Volusenus ordered out the oars and watched until the rowing was in full swing, beating time for the discouraged men until the oars all moved in unison. Then he turned on Tros suddenly:

"Why should I trust you?" he demanded.

"Why not? By the gods, why not?" Tros answered. "Have I played *you* false? I might have stayed in Britain. I might have wrecked this ship. For the rest, you shall hear me speak in praise of you to Cæsar's face. What do you find untrustworthy about me?"

"You are a Greek!" said Caius Volusenus.

"Nay, not I! I am a Samothracian," said Tros.

Caius Volusenus did not care to know the difference. He snorted. Then he ordered the idle sail brailed up to the spar; and for a while after that he beat time for the rowers, who were making hardly any headway against the tide that was setting strongly now the other way.

At last he turned again to Tros, standing squarely with his hands behind him, for the ship was reasonably steady; and except for those too narrowly spaced eyes he looked like a gallant Roman in his fine bronze armor; but he spoke like a tradesman:

"If you will swear to me on your father's honor, and if you will agree to leave your father in Gaul as a hostage for fulfilment of your oath, I will see what can be done about a small boat—in the matter of the pearls. You would have to give me two-thirds of the pearls."

"Two-thirds if you like," said Tros, "but not my father! He knows these waters

better than I do. He is a better pilot and a wiser seaman. Unless Cæsar sets him free on my return, Cæsar may rot for a pilot—and all his ships and crews—and you along with him!"

Caius Volusenus faced about again and cursed the rowers volubly. Then, after a while, he ordered wine brought out for them and served in brass cups. That seemed to revive their spirits and the rowing resumed steadily.

After a long time Caius Volusenus, with his hands behind him, came within a pace of Tros and thrust his eagle nose within a hand's length of his face.

"*Where* are these pearls?" he demanded.

"In a woman's keeping."

"Why did you bring none with you?"

"Because, although the woman loved me nicely, there was scant time, and she has a husband, who is something of a chief. She begged me to take *her* with me. But I did not see why Cæsar should have these pearls, and I had not thought of you and what a confederate you might be."

Conops, squatting on the steps that led to the after-deck, was listening, admiring, wondering. Greek to the backbone, he loved an artful lie. His face rose slowly above the level of the deck; his one eye winked, and then he ducked again.

"Well, let us leave your father out of it," said Caius Volusenus. "He is Cæsar's prisoner; let Cæsar free, keep, or kill him. That is nothing to me. I have a wife in Rome. Strike the bargain, Tros——"

Tros nodded.

"—and remember this: I hold no Greek's oath worth a drachma, but I hold my own inviolable. If you fail me, I swear by the immortal gods that I will never rest until you, and your father both, have been flogged to death by Cæsar's legionaries! Bear that well in mind. I have the confidence of Cæsar."

"You are a hard man," Tros answered, looking mildly at him; he could make those amber eyes of his look melting when he chose.

"I am a very hard man. I am a Roman of the old school."

CAIUS VOLUSENUS called for wine, and his own slave brought it to him in a silver goblet. He drank two gobletsful and then, as an afterthought, offered some to Tros. It was thin, sour stuff.

There was no more conversation. Caius Volusenus went below into his cabin, to sleep and regain strength after the long seasickness. The rowers just kept steering way, and Tros plied the helm until the tide turned; but even with the changing tide no wind came and they made but slow progress until moonlight showed the coast of Gaul, and Caritia* sands still ten or twelve miles in the offing.

Then Caius Volusenus came on deck again and fumed because the anchor had been left behind. He feared those sand-banks, having seen too many galleys go to pieces on them and he did not want to do the same thing under Cæsar's eyes.

Beyond the banks the masts of half a hundred ships stood out like etchings in the haze, and the glow of Cæsar's camp-fires was like rubies in the night. The sea was dead, flat calm, but Caius Volusenus would not risk the narrow channel in darkness and the rowers had to dawdle at the oars all night long, while Conops took the helm and Tros slept.

As day was breaking, with the tide behind him and a puff of wind enough to fill the sail, Tros took the helm again and worked his way into a berth between two long rows of galleys that lay with their noses lined along the shore.

THERE all was bustle and a sort of orderly confusion, with the ringing of the shipwrights' anvils and the roar of bellows, the squeaking of loaded ox-wains and the tramping of the squads of slaves who carried down munitions and the provender to put aboard the ships.

At the rear was a fortified, rectangular camp, enclosed within a deep ditch and an earth wall, along which sentries paced at intervals.

Within the camp the soldiers' tents were pitched in perfectly even rows, with streets between, and in the center, on one side of an open space, where four streets met, was Cæsar's, no better and no larger than the rest, but with the eagles planted in the earth in front of it and sentries standing by.

The huts, where prisoners and supplies were guarded, were at the rear end of the camp, enclosed within a secondary ditch-and-wall. The horse lines, where the stamping stallions squealed for breakfast, were along one side, but Cæsar's special

*The modern Calais.

war-horse had a tent all to himself behind his master's.

In a line with Cæsar's sleeping tent there was a bigger, square one, with a table set in it and an awning spread in front; and it was there, in a chair of oak and ivory, beside the table at which his secretary sat, that Cæsar attended to business.

He was up betimes and being shaved by a Spanish barber, when Caius Volusenus marched up and answered the challenge of the sentries, swaggering with the stately Roman military stride and followed by Tros and Conops, who made no effort to disguise their deep-sea roll, although it made the sentries laugh.

There were a dozen officers in waiting underneath the awning, but they made way for Caius Volusenus; he passed through, nodding to them, leaving Tros and Conops to wait until they were summoned.

But they were not without entertainment, although no man spoke to them; for in the middle of the open space exactly in front of the eagles*, a naked Gaul, held down by four legionaries, was being flogged by two others for stealing, each stroke of the cords laying open the flesh.

And there was a row of prisoners to be considered, women among them, lined up under guard awaiting Cæsar's will concerning them.

It was a long time before Cæsar sent for Tros. The Gaul was very nearly flogged to death and the earth was purple with his blood when Caius Volusenus thrust his way between the other officers and beckoned.

Having satisfied his dignity to that extent, he came forward a stride or two to be out of earshot of the others, and whispered as Tros fell into stride beside him.

"Cæsar is in a good mood. I have spoken for you. Make your news brief and satisfactory, and all will be well. Remember: Cæsar has decided to invade Britain. Speak accordingly, and offer no discouragement. I have told him you are a splendid pilot. Let him know that you and I explored the coast together."

Tros, smothering a smile, followed him between the officers and stood before the table where the Lombard secretary eyed him insolently.

Cæsar sat with a rug over his knees and his scarlet cloak hung on the back of the chair behind him. He was hardly forty-five, but he looked very bald and very old, because the barber was not yet through with him and had not yet bound on the wreath he usually wore. His cheeks looked hollow, as if the molars were all missing, and the wrinkles at the corners of his mouth twitched slightly, as if he were not perfectly at ease.

Nevertheless, he was alert and handsome from self-consciousness of power and intelligence. He sat bolt-upright like a soldier; his pale smile was suave, and his eyes were as bold and calculating as a Forum moneylender's. Handsome, very handsome in a cold and studied way—he seemed to know exactly how he looked—dishonest, intellectual, extravagant, a liar, capable of any cruelty and almost any generosity at other men's expense; above all, mischievous and vicious, pouched below the eyes and lecherously lipped, but handsome—not a doubt of it.

"So Tros, you return to us?"

His voice was cultured, calm, containing just the least suggestion of a challenge. He crossed one knee over the other underneath the rug and laid his head back for the barber to adjust the golden laurel-wreath. It made him look ten years younger.

"I claim my father," Tros answered.

Cæsar frowned. Caius Volusenus coughed behind his hand.

"Tell me your news," said Cæsar in a dry voice; the note of challenge was much more perceptible, and his eyes all but closed, as if he could see straight through Tros to the British coast beyond him.

"I landed. I was wounded. I was rescued by a druid. I met Cassivelaunus and his wife Fflur. I was shown an army of a hundred men, and I saw it dismissed for the harvesting. I heard dissensions. There was some talk of an invasion, but none ready to repel it. I saw Commius, and he is held a prisoner in chains. I stole a boat and came back."

"Examining the coast with me," put in Caius Volusenus.

"Saving the interruption, that is a very proper way to turn in a report," said Cæsar.

"You may withdraw." He glanced at Caius Volusenus sharply, once, and took no further notice of him as he backed away under the awning.

"Harbors?" asked Cæsar.

"None," said Tros. "There is a good

*Standards bearing the insignia of the different legions and the letters S. P. Q. R.

beach for the ships, good camping ground, and standing corn not far away."

"And the equinox?" asked Cæsar, glancing at the blue sky.

"I spoke about that with the druids. Yesterday's gale will be the last until the equinox arrives; that period is accurately known but none knows how soon thereafter the storms will begin, since they vary from year to year. But for the next few days there is sure to be calm weather."

"Why do they hold Commius prisoner?"

"Because he urged them to permit your army to land on the shore of Britain."

"Do they not know my reputation? Do they not know that I punish insults? Do they not know Commius is my ambassador?"

"They say he brought trashy presents that the women laughed at. They say he is a spy, not an ambassador," Tros answered.

Cæsar's face colored slightly.

"Barbarians!" he sneered, and then smiled condescendingly. "What kind of man is Cassivelaunus?"

"He fights nearly naked," said Tros. "He thinks armor is a coward's clothing."

Cæsar looked amused.

"Has he ships?" he asked

"I heard him boast of three."

Cæsar drummed his lean, strong fingers on the chair-arm.

"Well—I will wait until after the equinox," he said after a moment. "I have some small experience of druids. They are sly and untrustworthy. I am afraid these storms might catch me in mid-channel and scatter the fleet. I have only one strong ship; the rest were built in haste by inexperienced Gauls, good enough for calm weather, dangerous in heavy storms. And now of course, you wish to see your father?"

Tros nodded and smiled. For a moment he was offguard—almost ready to believe that sometimes Cæsar's word was worth face value.

"A splendid, dignified and noble looking man, your father. All the fault I find with him is his affection for the druids; a strange affection, not becoming to him. A great sailor, I am told. You say he knows these waters around Britain as well as you do?"

Tros nodded again, but the smile was gone. He forefelt trickery now.

"I will speak with him first," said Cæsar. "You shall see him afterward."

"Is he well?" asked Tros nervously. "Has he been treated properly, or——"

"I always treat people properly," said Cæsar in a suave voice. "There is nothing done in this camp except by my orders. You may retire."

He said the last words in a louder voice, and an officer marched in, who took Tros by the arm and led him out under the awning. Another officer was summoned.

Tros heard Cæsar's voice speaking in undertones, and less than a minute later he was marching between two officers toward the far end of the camp, where the prisoners were confined within the inner ditch and wall. There, in the gap that served as gate, he recognized the centurion who had promised to treat his father kindly, but he had no opportunity to speak with him.

He first knew that Conops was dogging his steps when the centurion on guard demanded weapons and Conops swore in Greek because they took away his knife with scant ceremony.

"Unbuckle my sword. Hand it to them," he ordered, and Conops obeyed.

A MOMENT later they were both shut into a low shed that had no window; a door was locked on them, and for fifteen minutes they listened to the steady tramp of a sentry, and the clank of his weapons as he turned at each end of a twenty-yard beat, before either of them spoke.

Then Conops broke the silence:

"Master," he whispered, "I can work my way out of this place. Look, where the wall is broken at the top. Lift me, and I can crawl out between wall and thatch. Let me find your father."

Tros hesitated for a moment, looking troubled.

"If they catch you, they will flog or kill you, Conops."

"I am a free man," Conops answered. "I may do what I will with my own life."

"Look like a slave, and speak like one. They will take less notice of you. Strip yourself," said Tros.

So Conops pulled off everything except a sort of kilt that he had on under the smock. Tros lifted him, and he crawled into the narrow gap where the top of the mud wall had crumbled because rain leaked through the thatch.

He had to force his way through carefully to make no noise, and he was delayed by having to wait until a sentry on the outer rampart passed on his regular beat. Then he dropped to the ground outside, and Tros heard him whisper:

"I will be a long time. Don't despair of me."

Tros picked up Conop's clothes and stowed them under his own, then paced the hut restlessly, for there was nothing to sit down on but the damp earth floor, and nothing to do but worry. At the end of an hour the door opened and a slave in charge of a centurion brought in a bowl of boiled wheat.

"Weren't there two in here?" asked the centurion.

"I don't know," said Tros. "The hut was empty when they put me in."

The centurion shrugged his shoulders, slammed the door again and passed on. Tros heard him ask another officer whether any record had been kept of the beheadings since a week ago, but he could not catch the reply.

There began to be a lot of trumpeting, the clang of arms and the tramp of horses. A voice that spoke in stirring cadences appeared to be addressing Roman troops, but the voice was not Cæsar's. Trumpets again, and then the sound of cavalry moving off in regular formation. Half an hour after that a Latin slave dealer, with his secretary slave and tablets, looked in while a legionary held the door open.

"I tell you, this one is not for sale," said the legionary. "Caesar has another use for him. There was another—a one-eyed man, but I suppose he has been executed."

"Extravagance!" said the slave dealer. "You soldiers kill off all the best ones. What with the beheadings and the draft for gladiators, males are worth a premium and females are a glut. I could bid a price for this one. He looks good."

"Save yourself trouble," said the legionary. "I tell you, Cæsar needs him."

And he slammed the door.

An hour after that came Conops, scrambling through the hole under the eaves and knocking down dry mud in handsful. They picked it all up carefully and tossed it through the opening. Then Conops resumed his clothes.

"Master, your father was in a round hut at the other end of this prison-yard."

"*Was?*" asked Tros.

"Was. He has gone. There is a window to that hut, with wooden bars set in the opening; and the window is toward the rampart, so I stood in shadow and had word with him. He has not been harmed, but he suffers from confinement. He was very grateful for the news of you.

"While I hid below the window, between the back of the hut and the rampart, an officer came who led him away to Cæsar. Then a sentry on the rampart spied me; so I pretended to be one of the slaves who clean the camp of rubbish.

"I picked up trash and climbed the rampart to throw the stuff into the ditch, as the others do; and so I saw them take your father into Cæsar's tent. Then I kept gathering more rubbish, and kept on climbing the rampart to throw the stuff away; so I saw them bring your father out and set him on horseback.

"The cavalry was lined up then—five hundred of them—and when they went away your father rode with them between two soldiers."

"Was he wearing his sword?" asked Tros.

"Yes."

"Which way went the cavalry?"

"Alongshore to the eastward."

"Did my father send me any message?"

"Yes, master. He said this: That after you started for Britain, Cæsar sent for him and told him he must pilot one portion of the fleet to Britain when the time comes, if he hopes ever again to see you alive.

"And your father added this: That that fleet will not reach Britain if he can prevent it.

" 'Tell him,' he said, 'it is better to die obstructing Cæsar than to live assisting him to work more havoc.'

"Then he told me to bid you not to be deceived by anything Cæsar may say, but pretend to serve Cæsar for your own life's sake, obstructing him in all ways possible, for the sake of those who sent you forth from Samothrace."

"That will I!" said Tros, scowling.

"Then I hid a while, and watched them change the guard at this end of the prison-yard. The officer and men are not back again, who were here when they put us in this morning; and I feared lest they should open the door and find me missing; so I made haste, but none saw me, although the sentry on the rampart passed me twice as

I was making shift to climb in, setting a forked stick against the wall to set my foot on, and kicking it away afterward."

Tros paced the floor like a caged animal, his hands behind him and his chin down on his breast.

"What if Cæsar should leave me here!" he exploded at last. "He can find other pilots than me."

BUT Caius Volusenus was too eager for imaginary pearls to let that happen. He came striding to the hut and gained admittance after the officer on duty had sent him back, fuming and indignant, to obtain a pass from some superior.

"Now Cæsar would have left you here in chains and have used your father only, for he trusts neither of you," he began, when he was sure the door was shut and none was listening. "But I spoke up for you, and I told Cæsar you are a man whose instincts compel you to navigate safely.

"I suggested he should send your father as a pilot for the cavalry, who are embarking a few miles down the coast. He agreed because that will keep the two of you apart. It is no use arguing with Cæsar."

"No use whatever," said Tros. "What then?"

"Pluto paralyze him! He began to wonder why I set such store by you! Cæsar would suspect his mother if she brought him milk!

He decided you are not to go with me on my ship, but with him on his, where he can keep an eye on you. And he has told me off to bring up the rear of the expedition."

Tros had not ceased to pace the floor all the while the Roman was speaking. Suddenly now he turned and faced him where a stream of sunlight shone through a crack beside the doorpost.

"How much of this is true?" he demanded. "Cæsar told me he will not start until after the equinox."

"All of it is true," said the Roman, showing his decayed front teeth in something between a smile and a snarl. "Shall Cæsar tell his real plans to every prisoner he questions? Listen to me now, Tros: You would never dare to play a trick on Cæsar; but perhaps you think because I am only Caius Volusenus I am easier to trifle with.

"I remind you of my oath! At the first chance I will take care to provide you with a small boat. That is my part of it. Thereafter you bring pearls, and the woman with them, if you see fit. You may keep the woman; but two thirds of the pearls are mine, according to agreement. And if the pearls are not enough, or if you fail me—" he showed his teeth again—"remember my oath, that is all!"

"Do your part," said Tros. "I will do mine."

Caius Volusenus nodded drily and shouted to the sentry to unlock the door and let him out. When he was gone, Tros took Conops by the shoulders.

"Little man, little man!" he exclaimed, "that Roman's avarice will thwart a worse rascal than himself! Cæsar, for this once at least, shall fail!"

CHAPTER XI

THE EXPEDITION SAILS

NOTHING further happened until midnight. Then the trumpets sounded and there began the steady tramp of armed men and the sharp, staccato orders of centurions. After that, Cæsar's voice, hard, brilliant, not saying much, but saying it with vigor. Then a shuddering clang as two whole legions raised their shields—a pause, two deep breaths long—and a roar like the bursting of a wave on fanged rocks——

"Ave!"

Short, sharp commands and the clang of shields, as cohort after cohort tramped away in fours toward the harbor. Silence at the end of half an hour, and then a dog howling and screams from a woman prisoner. At last gruff voices and a heavy tread at Tros' door, a glare of torchlight through the crack, a clang as a bronze shield touched another one—and the door opened slowly.

"Come!" said a pleasant voice; and Tros, whispering to Conops to keep close behind him, strode out into the torch-glare. The red light shone on the bronze body-armor of a veteran officer, who beckoned and turned at once, leading through the opening in the prison-yard wall, where half a dozen legionaries sprang to the salute. The two men who had held the torches stayed behind to search the hut for anything worth appropriating.

The officer led toward mid-camp, where

Cæsar sat on horseback, erect and splendid in his scarlet cloak, surrounded by a dozen torches and about two-score officers on foot, who were crowding in to listen to his last instructions.

No finer horseman ever lived than Cæsar; he looked like a god in the glare of the sputtering firelight, and the helmeted faces peering up at him shone with enthusiasm. His voice was calm, confident, unforced, and it vibrated with authority.

"Who is that?" he demanded, as Tros stepped into the zone of light, and Tros bulked bigger than any Roman near him, standing like a monarch in his gold-edged purple cloak. Sea-water stains and the dirt of travel did not show at midnight.

"Tros the pilot, General."

"What? Has he been put to an indignity? Where is his sword?"

Cæsar frowned, glaring at the faces all around him, but omitting Tros. Some one ran away into the darkness, shouting as he ran. Cæsar leaned forward and spoke to a slave who stood near him with tablet and stylus.

"Write," he commanded: " 'Cæsar will ascertain who submitted Tros to indignity and will punish the offender.' Pilot," he went on, meeting Tros' eyes at last, with a smile that would have mollified an angry woman, "not all of Cæsar's men are as thoughtful for Rome's friends as Cæsar is. On the eve of great events mistakes occur. You will understand that this indignity was not inflicted by my order. The offender shall be called to strict account for it."

The man who had deprived Tros of his sword was standing in the torchlight almost straight in front of Cæsar; he turned his head and looked at Tros brazenly, unblinking, with a faint, sarcastic smile. Some one came running through the darkness and thrust Tros' sword into his hands. The same man gave Conops his knife.

"That is better," said Cæsar, "I don't doubt that now you feel better."

He surveyed the sea of faces.

"Officers," he went on, "learn from this that there is nothing Cæsar overlooks."

With that he pressed his greave against the horse's flank and rode away at a walk, the torchmen marching to his right-and-left hand and the officers following in a group, their helmets gleaming, Cæsar's scarlet cloak like a symbol of Rome's majesty in air above them.

Tros was not left alone; two officers marched with him, one on either hand, and he knew himself, as they intended that he should, as much a prisoner as ever. Conops was no more noticed than a dog that follows a marching regiment.

ALL was in darkness along the harbor side, but Tros noticed that the usual beacon fires around the camp were burning as brightly as if the troops were still there.

A nearly full moon shone on rows of ships that had been pushed off from the shore and anchored; only one ship, and that the highest pooped and longest of them all, lay broadside to a wooden wharf, from which a heavy gangplank with handrails reached to her deck amidships.

Most of the officers stepped into small boats and were rowed off to their separate commands, but Cæsar, followed by five of them, rode straight to the wharf and urged his horse across the gangplank, laughing cheerfully when the animal objected.

Two legionaries started forward along the plank to seize the horse's head, but he ordered them back sharply and compelled the horse to do his bidding.

"A good omen!" he shouted, as the horse reached deck. "The gods, as ever, befriend Cæsar!"

"Ave!" roared the legionaries, packed so closely in the ship's waist they could hardly raise their shields; and the soldiers in the other ships took up the roar, until across the moonlit water in the distance came the last dull din of the salute.

An officer nudged Tros, motioning toward the gangplank, so he walked aboard, followed by Conops, and neither man dreamed of going anywhere except to the high poop, swinging themselves up the ladder as if the ship belonged to them. Then men on the dark wharf pulled the gangplank clear, and some one lighted a beacon in the ship's bow.

A man on the poop roared an order at once. Rowers, ready on the benches, thrust their long oars through the portholes and shoved the ship clear of the wharf.

Then another sharp order, and they swung together in the short, quick starting-stroke, their heads in line resembling the remorseless to-and-fro beat of a battering ram. That illusion was heightened by the thumping in the oarlocks and the hollow

clang of metal striking on a shield as some one marked the time.

Cæsar stood gazing astern, with his scarlet cloak wrapped tightly, and a shawl over his shoulders, watching the other ships haul their anchors and follow one by one. There were a dozen biremes, clumsy with engines for hurling stones and shooting volleys of arrows, their great iron dolphins swinging from heavy yardarms and their midship sections looking like a fortress.

But the remainder—nearly a hundred ships—were for the most part unarmed transports and high-sided, heavy-laden merchant-ships with corn, oil, wine, munitions and supplies.

The harbor became noisy with the thump of oars, but there was no shouting, and no light on any of the ships but Cæsar's, where half a dozen men stood by the beacon with sand and water, ready to extinguish sparks.

There was no wind outside the harbor. Cæsar's ship worked out beyond the shoals and waited until nearly all the fleet was clear and had taken station in four lines behind him. Then, in keeping with Cæsar's usual luck, a light south wind began to fill the sails. He turned at once to Tros:

"Pilot," he said, "make haste now and show me that anchorage on the shore of Britain. I will show *you* how Cæsar leads Roman soldiers."

Tros went and stood beside the helmsman, a Roman making way for him. There was a great deal of low-voiced talking on the poop, where a dozen officers were gathered; it annoyed him, he was trying to recall what Gobhan had explained about the tides, and to remember where the quicksands lay. He ordered the ship headed up a point or two to eastward, and Cæsar noticed it.

"Pilot," he said, "this is a Roman fleet. Each ship will follow me exactly. Carry that in mind."

Then he turned to laugh and talk with his staff-officers. There was excitement in his voice. He was like a boy setting out on a great adventure, although the moonlight shining on the back of his bald head considerably weakened that illusion.

He was the only Roman on the poop who wore no helmet and one of the officers warned him of the night air, so he tied the shawl over his head, and he looked like a hooded vulture then.

"For two years I have longed for this!" he exclaimed with a conceited laugh. "It will interest the Roman crowd, won't it, to see Britons walking in my triumph! They paint themselves blue. We will have to take some of their blue paint along with us to redecorate them before we enter Rome.

"I want it understood that any pearls taken in the loot are for me; I need them for the Venus Genetrix. I will be generous with everything else—you may tell that to the men."

Tros changed the course another point or two to eastward. Cæsar noticed it again. He came and stood beside him, staring toward the coast of Britain, where two or three enormous fires were burning on the cliffs, that would have resembled dark clouds except for those dots of crimson.

"Druids at their beastly practises!" said Cæsar.

For a moment he looked piercingly at Tros.

"Some one may have told them I am coming; they are probably burning human sacrifices to ward off the Roman eagles! However, they will find the eagles take their sacrifices in another way!"

Suddenly his mood changed, and the tone of his voice with it; he became even more conceited as he toyed with condescension—he would probably have called it mercy.

"I hope for their own sakes the British will not be foolish. The Gauls have shown them what must happen if they oppose Romans under Cæsar's leadership! Is there any wisdom outside Rome, I wonder? Sometimes I am forced to think not. I trust that you are wise, Tros. I reward as richly as I punish."

He returned to the group of officers and chatted with them for a while, Tros seizing the opportunity to head the ship a trifle more to eastward. But Cæsar noticed it. He came and stood by the helm again.

"Show me the place for which we are sailing," he commanded; and Tros pointed out the highest cliffs that overlook the channel from the British shore.

"Why not sail straight for them, as a Roman road goes straight over hill and valley?" asked Caesar.

Tros dissertated about tides and currents, that would carry the fleet too far to westward unless they made good their easting before the ebb; and for a moment after that as he watched Cæsar's face he

trembled for the whole of his plan and for his friend Cassivelaunus.

"Why not westward?" Cæsar asked. "Those cliffs frown gloomily. To me they look ill-omened—an inhospitable shore. Yonder to the westward there are no cliffs."

And, as Tros well knew, there were harbors to the westward, where a fleet might anchor safely through autumn storms.

"Swamps!" he answered curtly. "Mud, where ships stick firm until the high tides fill them! Unseen quicksands! Rocks! However—it is your business."

He made as if to change the helm, but Cæsar checked him:

"No, I hold you responsible. You are the pilot. It will be my pleasure to reward or punish."

THE wind increased and the following fleet began to lose formation, the heavily loaded provision ships falling behind and the others scattering according to their speed. Cæsar's ship was the fastest of all and was a long way first to reach the "chops," where wind and tide met and the sea boiled like a caldron.

Most of the legionaries, crowded in the waist, groaned and vomited, and Cæsar's war-horse had to be thrown and tied to prevent him from injuring himself.

Then Tros swore fervidly between his teeth, and Conops came to him to find out what was wrong, leaning on the rail behind him, tugging his cloak to call attention.

"Wrong?" groaned Tros. "I am! I have missed the quicksands!"

"Then we live!" laughed Conops. "I see nothing wrong with that!"

But Tros swore again.

"I misjudged the tide. An hour earlier, and all this fleet had——"

Cæsar returned to find out what the talking was about; his sharp ears possibly had caught a word or two of Greek. He stood and stared eastward, swaying, watching where the current boiled around shoals. The moonlight gleamed on the projecting spur of an island that was hardly above sea level*. There was white water within an arrow-shot of the ship's side.

Cæsar stared at Tros coldly, and then looked southward for a glimpse of following sails; the nearest ones were sweeping westward; tide, wind and current all combining to carry them clear of the shoals. Tros felt the goose-flesh creeping up his spine.

"You Romans are no sailors!" he remarked. "If Rome were an island, you would be a vassal nation! Do you see those shoals? A Roman pilot would have wrecked this whole fleet on them! As it is——"

Cæsar nodded; he could hardly keep his feet on the heaving deck; a cloud of stinging spray burst overside and drenched him; he clung to the rail.

"Let me not doubt you again, Tros!" he answered grimly.

Tros laughed.

"Cæsar," he answered, "do you let your troops doubt you? When danger seems imminent, do you let them doubt you?"

"You are a bold rogue!" Cæsar answered.

"Yet you live—and I could drown you easily," said Tros, "as easily as any of your men could kill you with a javelin in battle. Yonder is Britain, Cæsar! There are no more shoals."

Cæsar did not answer, but kept glancing from the ship's bow, where a long stream of sparks from the beacon flew downwind, toward the fleet, that had been forbidden to show lights. The rowing had ceased long ago; all sails were spread and glistening like wan ghosts in the moonlight.

Suddenly a ship a mile astern lighted a warning beacon and changed course westward. Fifty ships answered, and a blare of trumpets, like the bleating of terrified monsters, came fitfully downwind.

"Romans! Romans!" Tros exclaimed. "The Britons sleep deep, eh? Will you blame me if they know now how many ships are coming?" he asked Cæsar, jerking his head in the direction of the crimson flares that dotted the dancing sea for miles around.

Cæsar walked away to leeward and sat on a camp-stool where his staff, most of them seasick, were sprawling on blankets on the wet deck.

"He suspected you!" Conops whispered. "Master, he was nearer death that minute than ever *you* brought him. My knife was ready!"

Tros made a sound between his teeth.

"*Any* fool can slay a Cæsar!" he remarked.

"What would *you* have done to him?" Conops asked resentfully. "Was it accident that——"

*There was an island at one end of the Goodwin Sands until comparatively recently.

"I would have given him a true emergency in which to play the Cæsar!"

Conops was puzzled.

"Then—then you favor him, master?"

"If I ever should, may my guiding star forget me!"

"Then——"

"I gave the gods an opportunity to do their part," Tros went on. "It may be there are honest men on these ships, for whom the gods have other uses than to drown them. Or it may be that the gods prefer a second opportunity; the gods are like men, Conops; they delight in choosing. I will offer the gods a second choice. Bid that Roman yonder to set his crew of duffers hauling on the main sheet, if they are not all seasick. Up helm a little! So."

CHAPTER XII

THE BATTLE ON THE BEACH

THE wind grew flukey toward morning, and at dawn it died away. The white cliffs of Britain loomed out of a gray mist as Cæsar's men unlashed the coverings of the war-engines and set basketsful of arrows in position.

A doctor moved about among the men reminding them how to apply first aid, and two or three veterans inspected the armor of the younger men. The standard-bearer and his chosen inner-guards stood erect and splendid in the bow, and beside each rower two men stood ready to protect him with their shields and two more to fight for him.

But there was no sign of the fleet. A few lone trumpets bleated through the mist in proof the ships were not entirely scattered, and the sound stirred the gulls; thousands of them swooped and circled alongside, filling the air with melancholy.

One of Cæsar's staff officers approached him on the poop and, in a voice that every man on the ship could hear, announced:

"Cæsar, we Romans are ready!"

But Cæsar ordered a delay until at least a few more ships should come within hail; so the rowers dipped lazily, just keeping steering way, and the men in charge of the commissariat served coarse, dry bread in basketsful.

At the end of an hour's drifting a light breeze scattered the jeweled mist and Britain's cliffs shone dazzling in the sun, hardly a bow shot distant. To seaward the fleet lay spread over a dozen miles of steel-blue water, the supply ships almost out of sight and only eight or ten of the lighter galleys near enough to come within hail in less than an hour; but among those, and almost the nearest of them, Tros recognized the small ship with the heavy fighting top commanded by Caius Volusenus.

Cæsar ordered the trumpets sounded; and almost before the blast reechoed from the cliffs an arrow plunked into the water fifty feet away; whoever had shot it was invisible, but along the summit of the cliff, beyond the range even of the war-machines, there had appeared a swarm of men, who looked like dots against the skyline.

"That is no beach to land an army on!" Cæsar remarked, looking sternly at Tros.

Tros glanced eastward to where, several miles away, the beach was wider and the cliffs gave way to lower and more rounded hills that seemed to offer an opening inland.

"Have you a Roman who could have brought you thus near in the night?" he retorted, pointing. "Yonder you can land—or nowhere. And you had better make a landing this day, for I warn you, I can smell the weather breeding. Tomorrow, or the next day, or the next, the wind will scatter all your ships."

As the nearest galleys came within a mile Cæsar ordered the officers' assembly sounded. There was a race to obey the summons, and the first to arrive was Caius Volusenus, stepping out of a rowboat manned by Gauls; he stepped on to the poop and saluted Cæsar.

"I commanded you to bring up the rear with your ship," said Cæsar.

"General, where *is* the rear?" he retorted, smiling, sweeping his arm toward where the fleet lay spread on the horizon.

As he turned his head he spared a swift, wrinkled glance for Tros.

Other small boats arrived, and other ships' commanders climbed up to the poop, eager-faced and looking splendid in their armor, but some of them deathly white from seasickness.

Cæsar, making a great show of consultation, nodding as each man made his swift report, ordered them to signal as many fighting ships as could be gathered in a hurry and to follow him along the coast toward that break in the cliffs that Tros had pointed out.

And meanwhile, Caius Volusenus, working his way gradually out from the group of officers, had opportunity for a hundred words with Tros.

"This is a farce. It will be a failure," he said grimly. "Cæsar will force a landing, because he is Cæsar. I smell defeat. We shall be driven back into our ships. Now, about those pearls."

Tros smiled.

"You left an anchor down there to the westward. Conops and I could recover it," he answered.

"Good. It was a good, new, heavy one. It were a shame to lose it."

CAIUS VOLUSENUS slipped back into the group of officers and presently returned to his own ship.

Then ten or twelve ships, Cæsar's leading, rowed in double line along the coast in search of a practicable landing place; and Tros noticed that the Britons on the summit of the cliff had vanished.

They rowed slowly, observing the beach, and before they reached that gap between the hills, where the shingle sloped into the sea at an angle that looked as if beaching might be fairly easy, a small, fast galley overtook them, bringing word that the ships conveying cavalry had become scattered in the night and, finding themselves too near the quicksands with a rising wind and rough water, had put back to Gaul to save disaster.

Cæsar glanced sharply at Tros, who overheard the news and very nearly let a smile escape him. He could not altogether keep the laughter from his eyes. Cæsar beckoned him.

"Your father piloted the cavalry," he said.

Tros nodded.

"If I heard aright, he would seem to have preserved them from the shoals."

"And me from victory!" said Cæsar, scowling. Then suddenly he laughed. "Whether or not you and your father are to be given to the executioners, shall depend on the outcome. Pray for my victory, Tros!"

But he had grown thoughtful, and when they drew abreast of the chosen landing place he waited until nearly three in the afternoon for the heavier fighting ships to overtake him; and that gave the Britons ample time to gather in hundreds to oppose him, waiting for the time being out of bow shot, chariots, horse and foot all massed together, the men nearly naked and armed to the teeth, the stallions neighing and the war-horns braying as party after party arrived from inland.

"Barbarians!" said Cæsar in a loud voice. "They will be no match for Romans!"

And the legionaries laughed; but Cæsar continued to wait for more ships to arrive, until at last the whole of his two thousand infantry lay rolling within a bow shot of the shore.

But by that time it had been discovered that none except the very lightest ships could approach the shore close enough for the men to jump overboard without the certainty of being drowned in their heavy armor.

The lightest ships were ordered forward, but the Britons charged into the sea on horseback and in chariots and met them with such showers of javelins and arrows that the Romans had to lock shields.

One centurion leaped over the bow, shouting to his men to follow, and twenty of them did, but the Britons rode them down and drowned them, managing their horses in the sea as skilfully as on dry land.

Meanwhile, a score more men had been killed on board ship by arrow fire and javelins, in spite of locked shields. Cæsar ordered the ships back out of range, and the Britons yelled defiance from the beach, showing off, wheeling their chariots like whirlwinds.

But Cæsar ordered the ten heaviest warships into position on his right flank, as close as they could get to shore without grounding, and a hail of rocks and arrows from their engines swept the beach and then the rising ground beyond the beach, scattering the chariots and spreading death.

The Britons scampered out of range, leaving a writhing swath behind them, and Cæsar ordered the lighter ships inshore again.

The Britons wheeled, yelled, trumpeted and charged through the hail of stones and arrows into the sea once more to meet them. Fifty of them boarded one ship by the bow, leaping from the chariot poles and from horseback, and the warships could do nothing to aid in that emergency, for fear of killing their own men. The Britons were all slain, but they wrought red havoc first.

Roman after Roman plunged into the

sea, only to be ridden down and killed; for they jumped in shoulder deep and the weight of their armor made them helpless, whereas the Britons seemed to know the very underwater holes, and were as active as their horses.

But when a Briton was slain, he floated with the water crimsoning around him, where as the legionaries with their heavy armor sank; so that at the end of an hour's fighting there were scores of British corpses floating, and some horses, but no Roman dead in sight; and that fact encouraged Cæsar's men.

Moreover, the hail of arrow fire from the warships' engines had had its effect on the British reserves drawn up at the back of the beach to await their turn in the crowded fighting line—for the British method was to rush in and fight until they had a stomachful, and then to retire and give fresh men a chance to prove their mettle.

"These Romans are cowards and Cæsar is a fool!" said Conops in Tros' ear. "Two thousand Greeks would have landed an hour ago, against twice that number. Watch Cæsar's face! I wager we return to Gaul tonight!"

But Tros had hardly taken his eyes off Cæsar, even when the great war-engines twanged and whired and almost any other man would have been fascinated by the grim, mechanical precision of the gangs who worked them.

But it was Cæsar himself who fascinated Tros. Cæsar in his scarlet cloak was looking ten years younger. His cold eyes were glittering. He stood in one place, motionless, except that his head turned swiftly now and then. His men were flinching and discouraged, but not he.

"Bring me the standard-bearer of the Tenth!" he ordered suddenly.

A small boat went to bring the man, who left his "eagle" in another's hands and came and saluted Cæsar on the poop.

"Who can die better than in Rome's behalf?" asked Cæsar, looking straight at him.

It was a calculating, cold look, but the man smiled proudly.

"None!" he answered. "I will gladly die for Rome."

"Lead the Tenth to the shore!" commanded Cæsar. "I will watch you."

The man grinned and saluted, Cæsar merely nodding. Nothing more was said, no other order given; but, as if the eyes of all the fleet had watched that incident, there was a sudden stiffening and an expectancy that could be felt.

The man was rowed back to his ship, and in another moment he was standing in the bow with his standard raised.

IN ALL that din of twanging engines, clatter of the javelins on shields, grinding of sea on the beach and the creaking of cordage, the man's words were inaudible, but his gesture as he courted death was histrionic, dignified, superb.

He made a short speech, raised the standard high above his head, and plunged into the sea, neck-deep, working his way toward the nearest Britons, daring the immortal Tenth to let their standard fall into enemy hands.

With a roar and a clanging of shields they plunged in after him, many drowning instantly because the ship had backed off into slightly deeper water and the Britons were there in hundreds, leaping from horseback to swim and meet them where armor was a disadvantage.

The standard-bearer fell, but the eagle passed to another soldier of the Tenth, who carried it farther inshore before he went down and yet another soldier raised it; and by that time shipload after shipload of Romans had leaped into the sea and men were trying to lock shields, neck-deep, around whatever standard happened to be near them.

As they worked their way shoreward they had to meet the British chariots that charged in, hubs awash, six fighting men in each, who leaped along the pole between the horses and over the heads of the front-rank Romans, turning them to break up the formation from the rear.

Twice the legionaries quailed and fell back toward deeper water, but Cæsar withdrew the ships behind them, forcing them to stand and fight, or drown. And in the end it was that, and the British system of rushing forward to engage and retreating to give a fresher man a chance, that decided the battle.

The engines of destruction on the warships swept the beach, making it more and more difficult to reenforce the fighting line, smashing chariots with catapulted rocks and cutting down the horses with volleys of low-flying arrows.

And the legionaries knew their Cæsar; knew that he would let them drown unless they gained the day for him.

So the standards swayed forever nearer to the shore; and in the shallower water they could hold their close formation, although the chariots, with scythes set in the wheel-hubs, mowed them again and again. But they learned the trick of slashing at the horses before they could wheel to bring the scythes in play.

And at last a standard reached the shore, with twenty men around it, and the standard-bearer raised it high to plant it in British earth. The catapults and arrow engines had to cease fire then, as one standard after another gained the margin of the shore and paused an instant for the men to lock their shields in solid lines behind it.

The legions sang then—they were ever noisy winners—roaring to the British chiefs to lock their wives away because they brought Rome's common husband with them, who would leave a trail of Cæsarlings to improve the breed.

They sang of Cæsar; and they warmed themselves pursuing Britons up the beach. For after a few more chariot charges the Britons withdrew toward the forests inland, carrying off most of their dead and wounded, not exactly beaten, but in no mood to continue the battle.

"Barbarians," said Cæsar blandly on the high poop. "Such people rarely care for fighting when the sun goes down. We will anchor here. Put provisions ashore!"

A centurion came rowing out to say that there was good ground for a camp within a furlong of the shore, so Cæsar ordered the picks and shovels overside. Then he jumped his horse into the water very splendidly in sight of the men of the Tenth, who cheered him to the echo, and rode ashore to hear the roll called and to weep and moan over the list of slain—for he was very good indeed at that.

"Anchor here for the night!" said Tros in Greek to Conops. "Cæsar is mad! The gods——"

"Aye, anchor!" said a Roman voice beside him. "Can you pick up an anchor in darkness, Tros?"

Tros turned and looked into the eyes of Caius Volusenus. A small boat rocked alongside.

"Come," said Caius Volusenus with a sidewise gesture of the head.

But Cæsar habitually did not overlook much, even in the hour of victory. A centurion stepped up, who announced that by Cæsar's order Tros and his servant must remain on board the ship. Caius Volusenus cursed the fellow's impudence, but there was nothing to be gained by that.

"He who obeys Cæsar can afford to be impudent," said the centurion, leaning back against the rail and spitting overside. "What nice dry feet has Caius Volusenus!"

His own were wet, and he had a slight wound in the shoulder.

So Caius Volusenus, cursing savagely, climbed into his boat and had himself rowed ashore, while Tros watched the bustle of unloading, and studied the sunset thoughtfully. He observed that no ship had more than one anchor out, nor much scope to her cable.

"Cæsar is quite mad!" he remarked to Conops pleasantly. "If Cassivelaunus is not so mad, and if he happens to be sober, and remembers, I can see the end of this!"

An hour or so later in the deepening twilight, leaning over the stern, he saw three shadowy ships that ghosted westward, three miles out to sea.

They were smaller than the smallest Cæsar had with him, and the silhouettes were nearly crescent-moon shaped, so high they were at prow and stern. His seaman's eye observed how clumsily they yawed over the ground-swell, and how different the oar stroke was from Roman practise.

The centurion also observed them.

"Gauls," he suggested. "Barbarous looking craft—how I would hate to put to sea in them! I suppose Cæsar ordered them to follow the fleet and guide the stragglers, or perhaps to scout, in case the Britons should have a ship or two. But I wonder that he trusts such fishy looking rabble!"

"So do I," said Tros, noticing that the three dim ships had picked up a light wind that carried them westward finely.

He said nothing more until a slave came to call the centurion down to the surgeon, who had established a rough dressing station in the ship's waist. Then he turned to Conops.

"Cassivelaunus is not mad. He is not drunk. He has not forgotten," he remarked. "Those three ships were his!"

INLAND, camp-fires began glowing on the earthwork that the legionaries raised with pick and shovel —they had brought the firewood for the purpose with them on the ships. From the camp to the shore there was a line of sentries posted, but they were invisible; only the clank of their shields sounded as they moved occasionally, and a rising and falling murmur as they called their numbers, each man to the next one.

It was pitch dark, and the full moon not yet due for an hour, when Caius Volusenus came with an order from Cæsar in writing.

"I am to take my ship and pick that anchor up," he said to Tros. "You and your servant are to come and help me find it."

The centurion, with a bandage on his shoulder and his bronze waist-armor laid aside, objected. It appeared that the surgeon had hurt him, for he spoke between his teeth.

"Bite that!" said Caius Volusenus, thrusting the written order under his nose. "He who obeys Cæsar has the last word!"

But the centurion called for a torch and demanded to see what was written, and it was he who had the last word after all:

"Be careful! I am sure that Cæsar would be sorry if you should wet your feet or get hurt!" he sneered, and turned his back before the other man could answer.

CHAPTER XIII

HYTHE AND CASSIVELAUNUS

CAIUS VOLUSENUS' galley picked up the same wind that had wafted the three ghost-ships on their way, but it began to blow considerably harder and Tros, with his eyes toward the weather, chuckled to himself; for a nearly full moon rose astern with a double halo, and was presently so overcast with clouds that Cæsar's camp-fires seemed to grow doubly bright.

There were no lights on the ships that pitched and rolled at anchor, nor any on that of Caius Volusenus; but great fires burned in forest clearings and along the cliffs in proof the Britons were awake and stirring.

Caius Volusenus fretted on his poop, anticipating seasickness and fearing it as some men dread an evil conscience.

"Is this that cursed equinox?" he asked, squinting at the wan moon as it showed for a moment through a bank of clouds.

"A foretaste," Tros answered.

But he was not so sure. He was afraid old Gobhan had miscalculated, for the gale blew fresher every minute and, with a rising sea behind, the galley pitched and yawed like a barrel adrift.

"Keep a lookout for the bearings," he ordered Conops. "Remember that bleak headland and the level land to westward of it."

Conops waited until Caius Volusenus went and lay to leaward vomiting. Then:

"Master," he said in a low voice, "neither you nor I can find a spar tied to an anchor on a night like this. Why not run into the port of Hythe, if we can find the entrance, and seize this ship with the aid of those Britons, and——"

"Because we would have to fight for the ship, and there would be men slain, and I am not a slayer."

"Then what? Are we to wait until the morning, and then quarter the sea until we find that spar?"

"I am a liar on occasion," Tros answered. "If I lie like a Greek this night, and you lie like a Trojan; and if Caius Volusenus' brains are all aswim from vomiting; and if his crew is not much better off, who shall know we lie, except we two?

"Look out, then, for the bearings of that spar; for I hate to lie like a Roman, without appearance of excuse! Pick them up soon, Conops, pick them up soon! For if I am ever to bring this wallowing hulk into the wind I must do it presently, before the gale grows worse!"

So when they bore down by the great grim headland near where the galley had pitched at anchor while Tros was in Britain, Conops cried out suddenly and pointed to where the moon shone for a moment between black waves.

Tros roared out to the crew and wore the ship around, at a risk of swamping, dousing the sail then and letting her high poop serve the purpose of a sail to keep her head to the waves.

Then Conops tied an oil-soaked bundle of corn sacks to the ship's bow, and in the smooth, slick wake of that he launched a small boat, forcing four of the crew to help him by pretending he had orders straight from Caius Volusenus.

But the Roman commander was in no condition to give orders. Dimly, in between the throes of vomiting, he understood that they had reached the place where

the anchor had been buoyed; it certainly never occurred to him that, even if the dancing spar should have been seen, the ship had drifted from it downwind long since, and that no small boat could hope to work to windward.

He groaned and wished whoever came to question him across the Styx.

Had he given orders, it is likely they had come too late; for Tros held the boat while Conops jumped in—then followed in the darkness, pushing off before a man could interfere, and the last they saw of Caius Volusenus was his pale face over the ship's stern—whether vomiting, or watching to see them drown, they never knew.

THEY had no sail. Their oars were short, and the boat was made for harbor work—an unsafe, rickety, flat-bottomed thing that steered like a dinner dish.

"To the shore!" yelled Tros, pulling stroke, "and when she upsets, cling to your oar and swim for it!"

But when a man and a loyal mate give thought to nothing except speed, and are perfectly willing to upset if that is written in their destiny, they upset not so easily. It is the men who hesitate and calculate who lose out on a dark night in a stormy sea. Strength, and a vision of what is beyond, work wonders.

So it happened that the breakers pounding on the shingle beach that guards the marshes to the east of Hythe threw up a boat and two men clinging to it, who stood still, shivering in the wind a while and watched a ship a mile away that rolled her beam ends under while her crew struggled to make sail and run before the storm.

"May they drown!" remarked Conops bitterly, perhaps because his teeth were chattering.

"They will not," said Tros, half closing his eyes as he peered into the wind. "There is no real weight to this. It is a foretaste. It will die before daylight. Old Gobhan was right after all—I was a fool to doubt him. The equinox will come with the full moon. Cæsar's men will ride this out successfully and think they can repeat it when the full gales come! Now—best foot forward and be warm!"

Tros wrung the salt water from his cloak and led the way, keeping to the beach where the going was difficult, but the direction sure, swinging his sword as he went along, until he found dry sand into which to plunge the blade.

There was no sound to break the solitude except the pounding of waves on shingles; no light except the wan moon breaking through the clouds; no sight of Caius Volusenus' ship. They could no longer see the lights of Cæsar's camp behind them, but on the hills to the right the Britons had huge fires burning, that made the wind-swept beach seem all the lonelier.

Hungry and utterly tired they reached the swamp beside Hythe harbor three hours before dawn, and chanced on one of the narrow tracks that wound among the reeds, between which, once, they caught a glimpse of four shadowy ships at anchor, one much smaller than the other three.

But though they hailed, crying "Gobhan! Oh, Gobhan!" there was no answer; their voices echoed over empty wastes of water, and the track they were following came to an end at a place where a boat had been hidden in the rushes. But the boat was gone.

"Shall we swim for it?" asked Conops.

Tros had had enough of swimming for one night. He roared again for Gobhan and, disgusted with failure, turned to retrace his steps and find another track, jerking his heels out of the soggy mud and stumbling, until suddenly he heard a voice among the reeds ten yards away, and crouched, sword forward. Then he heard three Britons talking, and one voice he thought he recognized.

"I am Tros!" he shouted, shouting louder than he knew; and a laugh he could have picked out of a hundred answered him:

"Why not call for me? As well cry out for the Sea-God as for Gobhan!"

Cassivelaunus broke through the reeds, seized Tros by the hand and dragged him on to firmer ground, where two other Britons, one of them wounded, leaned on spears.

"Gobhan died, say I. The sailors say the Sea-God called him. If you should tell me that the sailors threw him overboard, I would think three times before giving you the lie," said Cassivelaunus. "I knew you would come, Tros. My chariot is yonder. I heard you shouting."

He led the way with long, sure-footed strides to where his chariot waited with at least a dozen mounted men who wore wolf-skin cloaks over their nearly naked bodies.

"I left Fflur with the army, because she can hold them as none else can," he explained. "What do you think now of us Britons? Did we fight well?"

"Not so well as Cæsar," Tros answered.

Cassivelaunus laughed, a shade grimly.

"Two thirds of my men were late. They are not here yet," he added. "If Cæsar's cavalry should come——"

But it was Tros' turn to laugh. He knew the cavalry would not come.

"My father is the pilot for the cavalry," he answered. "He is a wiser man than I—a better sailor. If he has not wrecked them on the quicksands——"

"Yonder with my three ships is a little one from Gaul," said Cassivelaunus. "The Gaul brings word that Cæsar's cavalry have put back into port."

"They will never reach Britain, if my father lives," said Tros; to which Cassivelaunus answered two words:

"Gobhan died!"

He seemed to think that was an evil omen.

THERE was no more talk until they reached a long, low building just outside the town of Hythe, where women were serving mead and meat by torchlight to a score of men who had evidently not been near the fighting.

Cassivelaunus was in a grim mood, with an overlying smile that rather heightened than concealed it, hardly nodding when the new men greeted him, refusing mead, refusing to be seated, saying nothing until silence fell.

But Tros ate and drank; the chieftainship was none of his affair.

"We are beaten," said Cassivelaunus at last, "and for lack of a thousand men to answer their chief's summons! Cæsar has landed, and has already fortified his camp. It is your fault—yours and the others' who have not come. I am ashamed."

There was murmuring, particularly in the darker corners where the torchlight hardly reached.

"We defend Hythe. Cæsar fears us, or he would have brought his fleet to Hythe," a man remarked. "He does not fear you, because he knows you are a weak chief. Was he wrong? Has he not defeated you?"

Cassivelaunus made a gesture of contempt, then folded both arms on his breast — and it was naked, as he had exposed it to the enemy.

"Hold Hythe then!" he answered. "Ye are not worth coaxing. The men who fought today are my friends, and I know them. Ye are not my friends, and I will never know you. But I bid you hold Hythe for your own sakes.

"For if Cæsar learns of the harbor and brings his fleet in here, he will stay all winter; and then, forever ye are Cæsar's slaves! But it may be, ye would sooner be the slaves of Cæsar than free men under Cassivelaunus."

They murmured again, but he dismissed them with a splendid gesture.

"Get ye gone into the darkness, where your souls live!" he commanded.

But a dozen stayed and swore to follow him, and when he had repudiated them a time or two he accepted their promises, although without much cordiality.

"They who fought today, have fought. I know them. Ye who had not fought, have to prove yourselves."

And presently, one by one, the others who had gone out at his bidding into darkness began to slink back, until the room was full again. The women brought in mead, and Cassivelaunus consented to drink when they had begged him two or three times, but he only tasted and then set the stuff aside.

"And now, Lord Tros—my brother Tros," he said, smiling gratefully at last, "so your father is safe? I am not in debt to you for that life yet?"

"I am a free man and you owe me nothing," Tros answered. "My father is a free man, and his life is his, to give or to withhold until his time comes. And I told you that I drive no bargains, for I never knew the bargain that was fair to both sides; so I give or I withhold, I accept or I reject, as I see right, and let Them judge my acts whose business that is!

"But I warn you: If I live, and if my father lives and is a prisoner in Gaul, I will invite you to help me rescue him. As to what your answer will be, that is your affair."

"I am your friend and your father's friend," said Cassivelaunus. "I have spoken before witnesses."

There was a pause, a long, deep breathing silence, until Cassivelaunus glanced around the room, and said:

"I would be alone with Lord Tros."

They filed out into darkness one by one;

but Conops stayed, and Cassivelaunus nodded to him.

"What said Gobhan of the tides?" he asked, and sat down on a roughly carved chair, leaning his head against the back of it. He seemed tired out. "I can wear out Cæsar and his little army. But if more ships come, and cavalry, and more supplies——"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"The full moon, and the high tide, and the equinox," said Tros grimly. "Three more days, and then the storm will burst. For my part, I would rather that the gods should kill men than that I should be the butcher. How many were slain today?"

"Of my side? Three hundred and nine. And of Cæsar's?"

"More than four hundred," said Tros. "That is death enough for the sake of one man's glory and a helmet full of pearls! Are you a crafty liar? Can you lie to Cæsar and delay him while I loose his ships for the storm to play with?"

"How shall I convince him?" asked Cassivelaunus.

"Give him Commius! Promise to give other hostages and to pay him tribute. Promise him pearls."

Cassivelaunus nodded.

"Aye—he is welcome to Commius the Gaul!"

"A lie well told is worth a thousand men!" said Tros. "Truth is good, and pride is good. But Cæsar measures truth by bucketsful, and he is prouder, with a meaner pride, than you or I could be if we should live forever. Therefore, swallow pride and lie to him."

"That is what Fflur advised," said Cassivelaunus.

"She has vision. Her advice is good."

"And the longships?"

"Will the crews obey me?" asked Tros. "If they slew Gobhan, what will they do to me?"

"You are a man after their own heart. Gobhan was a wizard and they feared him," said Cassivelaunus. "They will stand by you, for I have promised each man coin enough to buy mead for a year!"

Tros thought a minute.

"Hide two ships among the reeds," he answered then, "and put all three crews on the third ship. Select the worst ship for me, for you will lose it! See that the men have knives or axes. Then leave me here; fetch Commius the Gaul, and send him to Cæsar with a man you trust, to offer hostages and tributes.

"But don't trust yourself within Cæsar's reach, because he is a craftier liar than ever you can hope to be! He will speak you fair, but he will hold you prisoner if you approach him near enough; and he will march you in his triumph through the Roman streets, if he has to lose a thousand of his men in order to accomplish it.

"Thereafter they will cut your head off in a stinking dungeon and toss your carcass to the city dogs and crows—they keep a dung hill for the purpose."

THEY talked for an hour after that, and then went and routed out the ship's crews, who had come ashore to drink in Hythe. Half drunk already, wholly mutinous, they challenged Tros, telling him they had no use for autumn storms and still less use for lee shores where Roman fleets were anchored. They had seen enough of Cæsar on their way down.

But Tros smote a captain with his fist, and flung the mate crashing through a shutter. Thereafter, disdaining to draw his sword on fishermen, he seized a wooden bench and cracked a skull or two with that, until the bench broke and the Britons began to admire him.

Cassivelaunus looked on grimly, offering no aid.

"For if I help you, Tros, they will say I helped you. It is better that they learn to fear you on your own account," he remarked.

They also learned a quite peculiar respect for Conops. He knew all the tricks the long shore pressgangs used in the Levant for crimping sailors. He could use the handle of his knife more deftly than those Britons used a blade, and it was hardly dawn when all three crews decided they had met their masters, piled, swearing but completely satisfied, into small boats and rowed themselves to one ship, ready to continue to obey their new commander.

CHAPTER XIV

"IF CÆSAR COULD ONLY KNOW."

THAT ship, with sixty men aboard, was something worse than Tros had ever known in all his sea experience. It would have been bad enough, if he could have put

to sea at once, with hard labor at the oars to keep the three crews busy; but a three-day wait, with all provisions short and Hythe in sight, full of mead and women, and no news—but a mystery—and fires along the hills at night was invitation to the Britons to display the whole of their inborn and accumulated zeal for doing just the opposite of what they should.

They knew a thousand reasons why they ought to go ashore; not one for staying where they were. They wanted to revisit the two other ships and make sure all was well with them in the mud berths where they lay concealed.

They demanded money, mead, more food and better; they insisted on new cordage; they proposed to go a-fishing; they fought with one another, with the new knives Cassivelaunus had provided; they refused to make repairs, and pointed out whatever needed doing as a good enough excuse for going ashore forever.

They listened to Tros' promises with leering grins that told of disbelief; and when he scuttled the small boats, to keep them aboard ship, eleven of them swam ashore and yelled from a place of safety amid the reeds to all the others to swim and join them.

That same night the eleven swam back again, reporting that the men of Hythe were a scurvy gang, and the women worse; they proposed to storm the town and burn it in revenge for having been refused free food and drink, and they promised Tros full obedience thereafter, if he would only lead them to the night assault.

And Tros suffered another anxiety, even greater than they could provide. The weather held calm and gray, with varying light winds that might have tempted Cæsar's ships to look for safer anchorage—or might have tempted the cavalry to sail again from Gaul.

He had no means of knowing whether the fleet still lay at anchor off the shore, nor whether the cavalry had come at last, nor where his father might be; and all that held him from setting sail for Gaul to find his father, was the knowledge that his father would despise him for having left a promise unkept and a duty unattempted.

Thirty times in three days his determination nearly failed him, only to return because he had to show himself a man to Conops, and a master on his own poop to the Britons.

But at last the night of full moon, and an off-shore wind that blew the reeds flat. That afternoon there was a tide so low that a man could have walked knee-deep across the harbor mouth. The gulls flocked close inshore and by evening the sky was black with racing clouds.

By night, when the raging wind kicked up steep waves against the tide, the crew swore to a man that they would never put to sea in that storm even if Tros should carry out his threat to burn the ship beneath them by way of penalty.

Yet he had his way, and even he could hardly have told afterwards how he contrived it. It was Conops who slipped the cable, so that the ship drifted toward the harbor-mouth.

Tros steered her for the boiling bar, guessing by the milk-white foam that gleamed against the darkness and the thunder of the waves; and when the ship pitched and rolled, beam-on, the crew took to the oars to save themselves.

Once clear of the bar, in darkness and a howling sea, there was nothing left for them but to hoist a three-reefed sail and pray to all the gods they had ever heard of.

There was no risk of Cæsar's men seeing them too soon, nor any other problem than to keep the ship afloat and close inshore. If the wind should blow them offshore, there would be no hope of beating back; and the oars were useless, with the waves boiling black and hungry and irregular.

The one hope was to hug the beach until they should work under the lee of the high cliffs, where Cæsar's fleet had more or less protection as long as the wind held in the north-northwest; and to that end Tros took all the chances, judging his distance from shore by the roar of the surf on the beach—for he could not see a ship's length overside.

Once he sailed so close inshore, and the crew were so afraid, that six men rushed him at the helm, meaning to beach the ship and jump for it; but Conops fought them off, and Tros held his course—in good deep water within thirty feet of shore.*

And presently the crew began to wonder at him and to think him an immortal. When the moon broke through the racing clouds he looked enormous at the helm, with his cloak and his black hair streaming

*A modern battle-ship can approach the shore between Hythe and Sandgate close enough for a stone to be thrown on her deck from the beach.

in the wind, one leg against the bulwark and his full weight strained against the long oar.

THEN the rain came, and the lightning gleamed on the gold band on his forehead. And when he laughed they knew he was a god and he knew something else—that Cæsar's fleet was at his mercy!

For the lightning flashes shone on high white cliffs with foam below them, tossing Cæsar's anchored ships; and he knew old Gobhan had been right about the high tide and the full moon; knew that he, too, had been right when he declared that Cæsar and his men were mad.

For they had beached the lighter ships, and as they lay careened the high tide had reached and filled them. Flash after flash of lightning showed the Romans laboring at cable-ends to haul them higher out of water, while the surf stove in their sterns and rolled them beam-on, while a cable-length from shore the bigger ships plunged madly at short anchor-ropes, without a crew on board to man them if they broke adrift.

So Tros laughed aloud and sang, and Conops chanted with him. And because they reached the lee of the high cliffs it grew a little calmer; but the Britons thought that Tros, being superhuman, had so ordered it, so when he roared to them to shake out all the reefs and man the sheets and stand by, they obeyed him, knowing there would be a miracle.

They hauled the yard up high and let the full force of the wind into the sail, all sixty of them working with a will. Then Tros put the helm up and turned square before the storm, for he had picked out Cæsar's galley, with the high poop, plunging closer inshore than the rest.

"Belay the sheets! Stand by to grapple!" he commanded, bellowing bull-throated down the wind.

And Conops leaped into the waist to hammer men's ribs with his knife-hilt and drive them aft along the bulwark ready for the crash.

They struck the galley head-on, crashing in their own bows on the Roman's beak. And no need then to tell those Britons what to do; they had fought too many Northmen at close quarters. The galley's cable parted at the shock, and the sail bore both ships seaward, grinding as they plunged, until the sail split into ribbons and Tros let go the helm at last.

"Jump!" he roared.

But there was no need. He was the last man overside, scrambling up the galley's bows as the British longship heeled and filled and sank under the grinding iron beak.

He was at the helm of Caesar's ship more swiftly than she swung her broadside to the wind; and before Conops could compel the Britons to make sail—they were bent on looting, and the knife-hilt had to go to work—he got control enough, by straining at the helm, to drift across a warship's bows and break her cable, sending her loose into the next one.

Then, wallowing in the trough of steep waves, clumsily and fumbling in the dark with Conops jumping here and there among them, the Britons hoisted sail. And Tros, caring nothing whether the sail held or parted, nor whether he sunk the galley and himself too, broke cable after cable down the line until the whole of Cæsar's anchored fleet was drifting in confusion, galley crashing into galley, timbers splintering, and here and there the cry of a Roman watchman for help from nobody knew where.

BLACK night and sudden lightning shimmering on the white cliffs. Darkness again and the crimson of Cæsar's camp-fires streaming down the wind. Thunder of the hollow warships duelling together in the trough between the waves.

Cracking of spars and masts—shouts—panic —trumpet blowing on the beach—and then a roar from Tros as he brought the galley head to wind:

"Three reefs—and look alive!"

He had drifted too far seaward now, and there was another line of forty ships he hoped to smash. But though Conops, laboring like Hercules and cursing himself hoarse, did make the Britons reef the thundering sail, he found he could not work the galley back to windward.

So he kept her wallowing shoulder to the sea and watched the havoc on the beach, where men were drowning as they tried to save the smaller vessels.

"Master, for what do we wait?" asked Conops, climbing to the poop to stand beside him.

"For Cæsar!" Tros answered. "I must see him! He must see me!"

But the lightning flashes were too short,

and the fires the Romans lighted on the beach too dim, and wet and smoky for that perfect climax to a perfect night.

"If only he might know who did this to him!" Tros grumbled. "I could die then!"

"And your father?" asked Conops. "If we knew that your father was safe," he shouted, with his mouth to Tros' ear. "But if he is Cæsar's prisoner——"

"Ready about!" roared Tros. "All hands on the sheets!"

Conops sprang into the waist, translating that command with the aid of fists and knife hilt, bullying but one third of the crew because the rest were searching like a wolf pack for the loot, ripping open sacks and using axes on the chests of stores. The twenty wore the ship around and Tros headed her south by east.

"Where to, then, now?" asked Conops, climbing to the poop again, breathless and exhausted. "Caritia?"*

"In Cæsar's ship? With such a crew? To fight ashore with one or two of Caesar's legions?" Tros answered. "Nay! I am not so mad as that!"

"What then?" asked Conops.

"I think we have given Cæsar all his bellyful. I think he will return to Gaul, if he can gather ships enough—for if he doesn't, Cassivelaunus will destroy him.

"Then I will claim that Cassivelaunus owes a debt to me. I think that he will pay it. He is worth ten Cæsars. He will help me free my father. Find me one of those British captains. Shake him from the loot and bring him here before they ax the ship's bottom loose!"

Conops returned with two of them.

"Can you find the way up Thames-mouth and to Lunden?" Tros roared at them, making them stand downwind where they could hear him plainly. For the wind shrieked in the rigging.

They nodded.

"Do you dare it in this weather?"

They nodded again, hugging armsful of plunder beneath stolen Roman cloaks. All they craved now was to take the plunder home, and time to broach the wine casks in the ship's waist.

They were afraid of nothing any longer, except Tros; he had not quite lost his superhuman aspect. But he knew the end of that would come as soon as they should broach the wine casks.

"With a different crew and a south wind I would dare it too!" said Tros. "You Britons will never become sailors if you live a thousand years, but I must make the best of you. Do you think, if you were dead, that you could work this ship to windward?"

They shook their heads as if they had not understood him.

"You can do it better with your life in you? Well then, throw all that wine overboard—all hands to it! You have your choice of dying two ways. I will kill the man who dares to broach a cask. And if you think that you can kill me and then drink Cæsar's wine, you will all die of a burning bellyache!

"You doubt it? Hah! That wine was meant for Cæsar's gift to Cassivelaunus, so he poisoned it with gangrened adders' blood and hemlock! Drink it, will you? Heave it overboard, if you hope to live and see the mouth of Thames!"

They doubted him, and yet—he had done wonders; it was hardly safe to doubt him. And it was difficult to rig a tackle in that sea, and they were very weary.

"Die if you wish!" said Tros. "Or make Thames-mouth if we can; for I am ready to attempt it. Choose!"

So they elected to obey him and, to save hard labor, broached the wine into the ship's bilge, where not even a rat would care to drink it.

"How did you know that Cæsar poisoned it?" asked Conops, as the empty casks went overside one by one.

"I didn't!" Tros answered. "But I knew we could never make Thames-mouth with a crew of drunken Britons. And a lie, my little man, well told, on suitable occasion, sounds as good in the gods' ears as a morning hymn—as good as the crash of the breaking of Cæsar's ships!"

"Set ten men in the bows on watch, and bring those fisher captains back to me to help me find the way. Then turn in, and be ready to relieve me at the helm."

He turned and shook his fist at Cæsar's camp fires.

"Ye gods! Ye great and holy gods! This were a perfect night if only Caesar could know who smashed his ships!"

THE END

*Calais.

STILL HUNTERS

By G. W. Barrington

Author of "Mostly by Phone," "Law," etc.

DEPUTY-SHERIFFS Luke Haskell and Dan Simmons were pitching horseshoes on the drowsy, sun-baked square which surrounded the old red courthouse.

Luke, the older and more experienced officer, kept one eye on the iron peg and the shoes which clattered about it, while the other maintained a focus on the upper right-hand window, behind which Sheriff Bob Forrest was in conference with Delaney, chief prohibition enforcement officer of the district, and Colson, the county prosecutor.

As to Dan, it was his first day as an officer, and he knew not the meaning of certain portentous signs which had caused Luke to remark several times during the forenoon that "business is about to pick up."

Reared on the flat away down in the river district of Seminole County, Texas, Dan was untamed and unsophisticated, though not inherently vicious.

He had become deputy because of his knowledge of the county and its people, his uncanny woods-lore, and his ability to smack a bullet into a designated spot before the clock ticked.

Dan's dark face, with its rugged, cleanly-chiseled, Indian-like profile, was topped by the usual piney-wood shock of untrained hair, black in his case. The big Stetson was new, so were the corduroys, spurs, boots and belt.

One more fact denoted Dan's callowness. He smoked a big cigar held exactly in the center of his mouth by four fingers and a thumb which clutched it as Babe Ruth grasps a bat.

As a townsman, Dan was new, new, new.

"Shore enough rotten luck," growled Luke, as he heaved a shoe, inclining his body with outstretched arm as if attempting to "English" it to the pin. "Us all dated up fur a big hunt on the flat, the boys down there all 'specktin' us, an' here comes this durn Jasper of a federalist to kick up a rukus 'bout a pesky still somewhars or other.

"Ol' Bob left his real hoss in the lot this mornin', an' rid down on the ol' roan, which means that he's savin' the good'un fur to-night, which means that we go arter a still with Delaney, which means also that we don't git it."

"What you mean, Luke, don't Delaney know his business?"

"Shore he knows his business. Trouble is he don't know our'n, but he won't keep out of it.

"His business is to look purty an' sign his paycheck on the back, an' send word to the newspapers every two-three weeks sayin' as how this part o' the world is ninety-nine an' nine-tenths dry an' gittin' drier every second.

"Our business is to say nothin' a-tall, but fetch in the stills an' the stillers an' turn 'em over to Delaney, so's he kin notify Washington that he has the outlaws of this here vicin'ty in a state of terror borderin' close onto nervous prostration.

"That'd be all hunky, if only Delaney didn't shoot out of his turn every so often, an' 'stead o' waitin' quiet-like till it comes time fur 'im to step in an' grab off the glory, he has to come nosin' roun', gittin' Colson

to put the spurs to Ol' Bob—not that the spurrin' makes much diffrence as a usual thing, but it's a goin' to spile our hunt this balmy night, or I kain't read signs."

With much creaking of new leathers, Danny swung a shoe calculatingly from hip to shoulder level, his watch-guard tinkling gainst his belt buckle with every movement of his lithe body.

But he never made the cast, for the sheriff's squat figure was framed in that much-watched window, and his slow voice came drawling out:

"Step up here a minute, will ye, boys?"

Inside the prosecutor's office the deputies found the usual situation. Delaney, an impatient frown furrowing his brow, wriggled in his chair, querulous, insistent, piling hasty sentences one on the other, and seldom listening to what any one else said. He appeared the perfect type of over-zealous official, untrained, naturally unqualified, but shunted into a position of responsibility by the Volstead law and the hastily assembled machinery for its enforcement.

The sheriff hunched comfortably in his chair, saying little and, to outward appearances, not particularly interested in what any one else said.

Prosecutor Colson, always a little uneasy when he had Delaney and Sheriff Bob Forrest on his hands, sought as usual to curb the government officer's onrushing zeal, while deftly prodding Old Bob; his well-meant endeavors meeting with small success in either case.

Luke, sullen and disgruntled, faced a chair to the open window, swung his boot heels to the sill, and spat disgustedly out at an unfriendly world.

Danny, awkward and constrained in unfamiliar surroundings, stood just inside the door, clutching his reeking cigar tenaciously and swallowing his Adam's apple once every five seconds.

At once it became apparent that Danny was to be the target. Delaney fairly snapped at him.

"Simmons, you've lived on the flat all your life, and know the people there."

"Yessir, every man, woman, child an' dawg."

"Well, State headquarters has it straight that a still is operating on a large scale down there, trucking the stuff over to Dallas and Fort Worth. You may know something about that, too."

"No, sir, I don't."

Delaney's frown became more forbidding, and he thumped the table with his fist.

"Look here, Simmons, we may as well come clean with each other. You ran a still down there yourself once, and you know I know it, though we never could prove it.

"We never loved each other a great deal, but you are an officer now, with a duty to perform. I want to cooperate and get results. You know that Old Beasley has made whisky down there for years, even before prohibition became the law. He can be convicted on your testimony alone, and we expect you to do the right thing."

Luke's chair legs thumped the floor, and he whirled up to confront Delaney, white with sudden rage.

"Is that the only still in this here country? How about——"

The sheriff stopped Luke with a gesture, then slumped back, twirling his thumbs idly, and occasionally spiraling an end of his drooping mustache around a stubby forefinger.

Delaney sensed just a little more hostility in the room than he ordinarily provoked. Between him and Dan was a smouldering feud, and Luke disliked him instinctively but he respected Bob as a capable officer, set in his ways, but efficient in the highest degree.

In an effort to smooth matters a trifle, he spoke in a mollifying voice:

"It's no use for us to work at cross-purposes. Headquarters expects us to bring in the still and the man, and Simmons is in a position to pull it off without any trouble. As I said before, even if we can not connect Beasley with present operations, Simmons knows enough to send the old rascal to the pen, where he belongs, and that is what we want."

Dan's reply was characteristically short and direct—

"I'll be —— if I'll do it!"

Delaney's chin thrust out.

"And why won't you do it? Headquarters has an idea that the men we want are expecting protection—" Delaney's thin lips twisted into a crooked, sarcastic grin as he continued—"and it certainly does appear that headquarters is right about that."

Dan dropped his cigar and took a step toward Delaney.

"Meanin' who?"

Colson came from behind his desk and interposed:

"Mr. Delaney, if you will value my advice enough to follow it, you will make no more remarks of that nature in this office, and, if you will permit me, I will add that it might be as well for you not to do it anywhere else.

"None of us is under your orders, so what we do for you is done voluntarily. As to Danny, all of us know his record, and we know, too, that his word is as good as another man's. Bob swore him in as deputy and that tells all of it. Our sheriff never has had any crooks on his force."

"I didn't mean that," hedged Delaney, "but you know how it is. Right or wrong, my superiors have certain suspicions——"

"Who'd they git 'em from?" interrupted Luke suggestively, quieting again like a trained hound, when Bob signaled him to be silent.

Pale and shaking with anger Dan strode past Delaney without noticing him, straight on to where the sheriff sat. Very deliberately Danny unpinned his shining new star and extended it to the sheriff, who noticed it by no word or look.

Simmons laid the emblem of authority on the sheriff's knee, and it slid clattering to the floor.

"Bob," said the new deputy, speaking deliberately and with a self-restraint that was not accomplished without effort, "there is a still down where I live, just as there is stills in other parts of the county, and in other counties."

"Now you're shoutin'!" cut in the irrepressible Luke.

"I ain't sayin' that Pappy Beasley never stilled no shinny* an' I ain't sayin' that he ever did. I am sayin' that he ain't doin' anything like that now, an' won't do nothin' like it from now on. He's done give me his word, an' that goes.

"Before comin' up here to be sworn in, I rode a good hoss all day to tell all the boys that I didn't propose to be no half a deputy, an' that they had fair warnin' to obey the law or take the consequences, expectin' no favors from me.

"I thought that was fair to them, an' to you, an' to Mr. Colson, an' would satisfy the law, but when it comes to turnin' ag'in frien's I've known all my life, an' sneakin' off up here to make trouble for 'em, I kain't do that, an' I just nach'ly won't do it, that's all there is to it or about it.

"I've been a deputy fur just one day, an' she's enough. Now I'm a-goin' back to the flat where men ain't ast to turn ag'in' frien's who has trusted 'em. If I ever turn to doin' dirty work, I'll take up bank robbin' or cattle rustlin' or something along that line that's more manlike than drinkin' toddy with a man, an' then turnin' him in."

"Now you look here," blustered Delaney, "if you're meaning any of that for me——"

"Shut up, Delaney!" thundered Colson. "Man alive, can't you see you're right on the edge of more trouble than one human is able to take care of?" Then more mildly— "We'll take this up again soon, and of course we'll work it all out. No use in getting excited and rowing among ourselves when there is work to be done. Let's quiet down and act sensible."

The sheriff heaved slowly out of his chair and, bending with a grunt, retrieved the fallen bauble which he silently fastened to Dan's shirt, his mouth twisting as he worked with the refractory pin. While completing the operation, he spoke, for the first time since the discussion started.

"Mr. Delaney, how soon do you reckon you'll be ready to go with us to fetch in that still? Any hurry 'bout it?"

"Well," the government man answered, "a week or so will do—any time this month that suits you."

"Uh-huh. Thought mebbe you might want to go right away. Well, when you're ready, we are."

"How about the man?"

"We'll fetch 'im in too, an', by the way, if they's anybody doin' any protectin' roun' here, he'll git his, same as the others.

"Now you boys run along an' git ready for your hunt. One of you better take the hosses, an' the other drive the truck. Them dogs ought to ride if they are a-goin' to travel over that ridge half the night.

"Say, Luke, run out to my place an' pick up that young 'Walker' pup my son sent me from Kaintucky. Turn him loose an' see what's in him. You better be gittin' started so's you can make the flat afore dark."

WHEN an Englishman, or a Kentuckian, or a resident of Old Virginie goes fox hunting, he gets out in broad, honest daylight, throws his leg over a good horse and sticks as close to the

* Piney-wood name for liquor made in the brush.

hounds and their quarry as his horsemanship and the nature of the country will allow. Californians chase the ubiquitous coyote and the so called mountain lion in the same way.

These aristocrats of the chase are surrounded with etiquette and bound down by as much tradition and formality as an English cricketer or a bridge lizard. Nevertheless, they ride straight and hard, take the jumps or fall, and there is nothing sissified in the game as they play it.

In the Southwest, the thing is gone at differently. An East Texan, Oklahoman or Arkansan turns his dogs into the brush, builds a pine knot fire, and sits down to listen to the melody. Always he hunts at night.

There are two reasons why he does this. The nature of the country will not allow of straight riding, and if the dogs should put up a fox in daylight some unethical native would be certain to take station somewhere along the trail, and shoot the fox as he came driving past.

Also, there are foxes and foxes. The red fox of the East is a rather rare find in the Southwest, while the gray fox is found in numbers throughout the wooded sections. On the prairies and mesas there are none of either.

The red will switch his tail saucily and thresh through the thickets for some six to twelve hours, no matter what dogs are after him, while his gray brother appears to enjoy the sport for from forty minutes to two hours, when chevied by real hounds. Whenever he feels indisposed to lead the pack any farther, he just climbs a tree or crawls behind a rock to sulk there until things quiet down a little. Probably fully the equal of his red cousin physically, he lacks the wily instincts of the latter, also the tenacity and courage to carry on to victory, or its alternative—death among the rending pack.

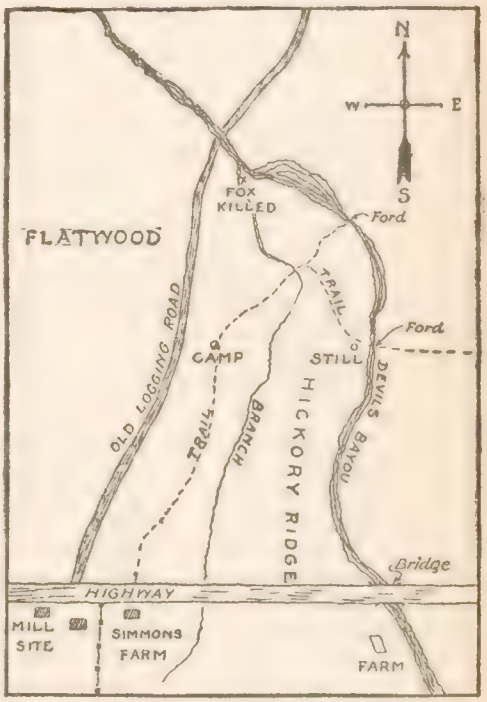
In fact, the red fox is a thoroughbred and a good sport, while the gray fox is a dub and a rank quitter. One is a brook trout, the other a carp.

LUKE and Dan arrived on the flat at early twilight, and found the local contingent busily arranging for the evening's entertainment. Some one had shot a shoat, and two negroes from Pappy Beasley's farm were preparing to barbecue the hams. Served hot, with cornpone and steaming black coffee, fresh ham, roasted in the embers of a wood fire, will do very well, especially about midnight of a frosty fall night when vigorous, rollicking hunters rally to the blaze.

Besides Dan and Luke, there were the inseparable Underhill boys, Beasley, Lem Whitaker and Asa Pound, all charter members of the hunt in that section.

Later on volunteers strayed in from various directions, attracted by the noise of the chase.

For dogs, there was Medley, Luke's old reliable "Walker" dog, getting along in years, but true-nosed, game and wise in fox lore. Beasley's Luce and the Underhills'



Drive and Buck, with the sheriff's puppy, made up the list of invited canine guests, but hanging about were numerous nondescript hounds, all hunters, but none of them a fox dog, in the full meaning of the term. Still they would fall in, when not otherwise engaged, and help to pump the heart out of a gray fox, but as strike dogs they were nonentities.

A half mile off the big road, with a shallow branch between them and Hickory Ridge,

the huntsmen cast off the dogs, and made themselves comfortable, knowing that most of the running would be done on the ridge, where many of the animals denned.

The ridge was about a mile in width and two in length, crossing the highway near the Simmons home. On the opposite side of the ridge from camp was Devil's bayou, ordinarily a sluggish ooze, but at times becoming a respectable stream. The road and the branch and the bayou formed a rough triangle, the base of which was the highway, and the point the meeting-place of the two streams. The timber was cut-over piney, with consequent brush and young saplings standing close among the virgin oak, gum and hickory.

Unleashed, Medley, Luce, Drive and Buck faded silently into the night, each on a busy trot which soon carried them clear of the stump smelling, drift pottering riff-raff of redbone and "tanner" hounds. Under the spreading branches of a mammoth white oak, with the fire crackling cheerfully and pungent cooking odors spicing the breeze, everybody settled down on the bed of pine needles to smoke, chat and wait for the music.

The sheriff's puppy romped in and out of the circle of light, thoroughly enjoying his first outing, but doing no service whatever. Now he climbed into some one's lap, begging to be petted, now he darted out to visit with some mongrel which was hanging about, attracted by the roasting meat. Once he contributed to the merriment of the occasion by baying a rooter sow in a fallen pine-top, where she had nested her litter, and reached camp and friends but a few feet in advance of imminent destruction between the wide-open jaws of the charging jezebel.

A clamor broke out on the bank of the branch a few hundred yards away, and two black-and-tans came bellowing along the stream, passing with a crash of underbrush as every cur in the neighborhood joined in. It was a cottontail rabbit and they soon lost him, only to go babbling about in circles, excitedly, but uncertainly, no one of them knowing whether to believe what the others said or not. This performance they repeated at intervals for an hour or so, then one by one they strayed off or came to the fire to rest after their strenuous exertions.

Ten o'clock and still no fox, nor as much as a whimper from a fox dog. Then away off up the ridge belled out old Medley's silvery voice, a single note which by its clarity defied distance.

The card game stopped, the impromptu wrestling match between Lem Whitaker and Wes Underhill was suspended as a draw, the negroes paused at their cooking and rolled their eyes toward the ridge. Then it came again and in another half minute again, then with two or three notes in succession—a cold trail getting warmer.

Old Luce joined in, her heavier chop mouth rendering baritone to Medley's bugling tenor.

Then "*E-e-ow-wow! Wah-wah!*" the two settled into a steady metronomic cadence. They had jumped him.

Drive and Buck added their capable voices to the chorus, and the quartet hustled their furry quarry down along the ridge, and went pounding off toward the big road seemingly under every ounce of steam their boilers would carry.

As the chase passed camp, Bob's puppy wrinkled his forehead, cocked one ear inquisitively, and whined in eagerness for something, he knew not what. As the little pack circled back and came up the bottom in full cry the pup's lithe body shot from between Luke's legs, and he took a dozen leaps with incredible speed in response to an inner stirring which he had not yet learned the meaning of, only to settle again on the pine needles, threshing his tail, every hair on him bristling with uneasy excitement.

An hour passed, and then another, and still the dogs kept that gray shape drifting along in front of them. Men straggled off from the fire by twos and threes to follow some known bridle path to a point of vantage.

Gallant old Medley still clung to the van. How did any one know that? Ask any old hunter, and you will be told that there is a tone in the voice of a dog which is telling the other dogs something that is different from the one which is repeating what the lead dog says. Even when the fox is running redhot and the scent lies breast high, the hound out in front throws a little of boastfulness into his song.

A good fox that, for a gray, but in two hours and eight minutes by Luke's hunting watch the harmony of the pack suddenly changed to a sharp, insistent clamor, and

everybody mounted and cut lickety-split down to the mouth of the branch, where they found the dogs leaping and clawing at a scraggly dead gum which leaned out over the water.

Having inspected the fox by the light of pine torches, they leashed the dogs, and set out for camp and supper, leaving a negro to cuff the fox off his limb after the customary thirty minutes of respite.

At the fire, they found a sturdy iron-gray man seated on a fallen pine, discussing a pork sandwich and inhaling ebon coffee with deep labored inspirations greatly like the breathing of a river steamboat caught on a sandbar.

It was Bob Forrest.

Everybody began chaffing the sheriff at once. It was a great dog he had, a marvelous hunter which had made the first strike of the evening and brought the game into camp alive. Would he sell it? Would he trade it for a team of horses? If it wasn't too much trouble, wouldn't he try to tell them a half or so of that long pedigree which had come with the pup?

Lem Whitaker, in his official capacity as justice of the peace, ruled that it was unlawful to keep a dog like that, as it would run all the game out of the country within a week. The chuffiest Underhill opined that the pup must have stepped on that pedigree when he started so quickly and stopped so suddenly.

Bob absorbed all the chaff with characteristic good nature.

"Thought I'd drop down an' hear the music an' see how the pup was runnin'," he remarked genially. "That's the only way to find out what a dawg kin do. I wouldn' believe any of you jealous houn' men under oath. You're just sore 'cause I got a good 'un an' you hain't.

"Anyway, if what you say is true, an' a gray led your pikers up an' down the ridge fur two hour 'n better, 'thout onct takin' to the briars, guess you hain't got no great big laugh comin'. If that there pup don't hustle a gray up a tree alone in that time six months from tonight, I'll tie that there long pedigree roun' his neck an' hang him with it. By the way, whar is he? You fellers didn' git sore 'cause he outrun yourn, an' shoot 'im, did you?"

"He was sniffin' roun' that snag where the dawgs treed," answered the slimmest Underhill. "Reckon he was tellin' his pedigree to that there fox. He'll come in with the nigger."

Food, coffee, more good-natured banter, including a fresh outbreak of chaffing at the sheriff when his pup arrived alone carrying a dried fish-head which some one had thrown aside down by the branch.

He wasn't a hog-dog, after all, but a fish-hound. Bob'd better look out or his dog 'd get arrested for fishing without a license, using that there pedigree for a line.

During the progress of the meal, the thirty minutes of grace for Reynard expired, and the hounds were taken to the opposite end of the ridge and freed, Medley and Buck striking fresh scent almost as soon as they were unleashed.

A short reach back toward camp, then the fox turned in a sweeping half circle, carrying the pack straight southward out of hearing.

No gray boy that, but a courageous red one, confident, willing to match brain and legs with the dogs, without hanging about the vicinity of the dens.

BACK at the fire the hunters sprawled again enjoying more coffee and lunch. Now and then the voice of the pack carried to them when the quarry crossed a rise or open spot, to still again when the fox took to the brush.

Besides the persons already named, some three or four guests still hung on. One of these looked altogether out of place in his surroundings. He was a shrunken fellow of indeterminate age, with a dissolute countenance and "grouchy" bearing. There was a suggestion of the Paris apache in his dress and manners, and a hint of the East Side in his accent.

As the night wore on, he appeared to brighten perceptibly, as did others in the crowd. In fact, they were drinking something other than coffee. Dan Simmons noticed that, and commenced to boil inwardly, especially as Pappy Beasley unquestionably was in the thick of it.

One would stray into the brush, then another, and each would return cheered, and ever more inebriated.

Finally the bald Underhill, the apache-like little fellow and Beasley drew back from the fire to discuss something which appeared to afford them a great deal of amusement. There would be a mumble of conversation, then raucous laughter, Pappy's strident cackle rising above the rest.

His patience exhausted, Dan set his teeth and started for the brush.

"Where ye goin', son?" called Bob, from the other side of the fire.

Before answering, Dan led the sheriff to a log where they could talk without being overheard.

"No ifs or ands or buts about it, Bob, you and I know that them fellers are guzzlin' shinny. I'm no hooch houn' to go nosin' roun' other folks' business, but they kain't make a fool out of me that way, specially when you are here. Seems like some one has put 'em up to it, just fur devilment. I'm goin' out there an' find their jug, an' smash it over a stump."

"Reckon I wouldn't do anything like that," the sheriff answered. "The boys is used to their toddy, an' I reckon you can't wean 'em too suddint 'thout makin' 'em cross."

Dan insisted. The sheriff opposed; in the end flatly ordering his chafing assistant not to interfere with the illicit festivities in the brush or to appear to notice anything out of the way.

The near rupture left Dan a little sulky, and he drew off by himself to frown into the fire, and wonder where the liquor came from.

From the gloom came another murmur of voices ending in a burst of laughter, then some one got a horse and went off at a trot which was recklessly fast for the gloomy forest trail.

In a half hour the rider returned.

More whisky, of course.

The sheriff rose and stretched.

"Le's jog down to the road, Danny, an' see 'f we kin hear anything. What say?"

Danny being willing, the two set off.

A little distance down the trail, the sheriff dismounted, flashed his torch over his horse from eartips to hind hoofs.

"What's up," asked Dan, "is Dick lame?"

"No, he's all right." Then with seeming irrelevance— "Much water in the bayou?"

" 'Bout stirrup deep."

Reaching the highway, the sheriff led his horse and searched every inch of the road, from where the branch crossed, on down to the bridge over the bayou.

Then the sheriff pulled his wisp of forelock, corkscrewed his mustache, grunted eloquently, and remounted for the ride back, which was accomplished in silence, the sheriff evidently preoccupied with his thoughts, and Dan still feeling the curb for the first time in his undisciplined life.

"Who's the little feller?" inquired Bob, casually, indicating the apache-like outlander, whom they found nursing his lean shanks at the fire when they reached camp.

"Name's Hendricks, but everybody down here calls him 'Tee Bee,' 'cause he's got tuberculosis. Come from Chicago, I think it was, thinkin' the piney air might help him. Lives in one of the cabins down by the ol' saw-mill."

"Uh-huh."

"Listen, Mister Bob!" called one of the negroes excitedly. "Dem houn's is bringin' dat ol' red rascal back, an' dey shuah is poundin' him on de back!"

Dan looked at his watch and whistled.

"Whew! Most five o'clock, an' they've been bitin' at his tail for more'n four hours. If he takes 'em another circle like that, it'll be up into the forenoon before——"

Luke had good ears; he interrupted with an impoliteness pardonable under the circumstances.

"They's a new dog fell in with 'em, an' he's leadin'! Shore enuff, he's got old Medley in behind!"

The pack breasted the ridge, and their cry burst suddenly loud.

Pappy Beasley took one more sly dig at the sheriff.

"Mebbe hit's Bob's dawg."

"Shore is," replied the sheriff, evenly. "He caught the fox scent down by that gum tree, an' he's a man dog now."

Then Reynard made a mistake—the last one of his career. Instead of turning again or denning up snugly, he beat right on up the ridge to the fork, where, finding water on each side, he became confused and attempted to dodge back through the pack.

Dead fox.

As the hunt broke up, Lem Whitaker paused from worshipful inspection of the "Walker" puppy.

"What you goin' to name 'im, Bob?"

"Wal, he's a little new at the game, an' he hates like sin to mind, but he's a plumb thoroughbred an' a sticker. Reckon I'll name 'im Danny."

WHEN the others had gone, Bob sent Luke ahead to pack their traps and the dogs into the truck.

The sheriff then sought his favorite side of the fire, filled his pipe and lighted it with

a blazing knot, which he pitched into the leaves beside the resinous top of the big fallen pine. A little circle of flame spread around the spot, and Dan stamped it out.

Saying nothing, Bob sought another torch, applied it to his already smoking pipe, then cast it into the very center of the top, which flared up almost instantly.

Mouth agape, Dan stared at Forrest, whose foot already was in the stirrup. He stared at the fire, and took a step toward it, then into his head popped the words: "He's a little new at the game, an' he hates like sin to mind . . . . I'll name 'im Danny."

Dan mounted, and rode off without looking back.

On the highway Luke waited to turn over his horse, to be led home. The sheriff climbed into the truck leaving Dan to bring all three animals, instructing him to make the thirty-five-mile ride by noon "or better."

A mile up the road was the old mill, and a light shone in one cabin.

Bob knocked on the door, and Tee Bee opened it. Behind him Bob glimpsed the curly head of one of the Beasley negroes thrust furtively from the kitchen door, and quickly withdrawn.

"Thought I'd better stop an' tell ye that there is fire out in the woods. Started from our camp, I reckon. Mebbe somebody orter keep an eye on it fur a day or so, or it might work across into the settlements."

"——!" shouted Tee Bee. "It'll burn up the whole country!"

"Oh no," answered the sheriff, coolly, "these woods down here hain't like the ones up nawth where everythin' burns an' the blaze runs like them houn's did tonight.

"Down here nothin' burns but the leaves an' needles an' dead timber, an' she travels slow. The wind's west, an' it'll be two-three days before a fire could work up agin it to the Jones settlement, an' if it did they'd be plenty o' time fur the neighborhood to turn out an' backfire it off.

"Goin' tother way, with the wind, she'll cross the branch an' work over the ridge, but there's nothin' she can hurt there. The bayou'll stop 'er on tother side, an' she kain't jump the big road.

"Well, we mus' be gittin' on. Just thought I'd stop an' tell you so that you could look 'er over tomorrow." Then, as if to quiet the other's fears. "Mebbe you better go tell Pappy Beasley 'bout it. He's an ol' timer, an' knows what to do."

Fifteen minutes later Danny reached a point a half mile past the old mill, to find the truck drawn up alongside the road, Bob and Luke craning their necks at him eagerly.

"Broke down?" asked Dan. "Why I thought you fellers'd be half way home by now. What——"

"Ne'mind that," said the sheriff shortly. "Meet anybody on the road?"

"No, but two men on hawsback crossed a quarter ahead of me, headin' into that ol' timber road."

"Travelin' fast?"

"Plenty."

"Know 'em?"

"One of 'em was ridin' Pappy Beasley's spotted hawse, but it wasn't light enough so that I could tell who they was."

The old sheriff, usually placid and easy-going, heaved his bulk into the saddle and snapped out orders like a brigadier.

"Luke, you drive the truck down to where the ol' log road crosses the branch. Wait there till I send for you, 'less you hear shootin'. Just coax the ol' bus along quiet-like, an' don't let them dogs do no yelpin'.

"Hickory ridge is a goin' to burn all but one place, an' in that place they's a still, an' the fellers that runs it will be rakin' leaves an' back-firin', or they'll be totin' the stuff out——"

Dan broke in:

"Say, you don't mean that ol' Pappy——"

"Naw, I don't mean ol' Pappy Beasley or ol' anybody or young anybody. The fellers that run the still'll be thar, that's shore. C'mon, Danny! Give us a good start, Luke, an' drive slow!"

THE morning was foggy and the heavy air pressed down a mantle of acrid pine smoke giving the ridge the appearance of a massive, low-lying cloud.

Here and there in the wake of the flames fire held in a decayed oak or fat pine stump. In the gloom living bushes took fantastic shapes as the lazily-changing smoke wreaths curled about them.

A six-gun on either hip, Old Bob toiled heavily up the slope, while Dan, with the inevitable little 30-30 on his shoulder, strode easily in the lead, slackening step now and then to keep in touch with his superior.

On the very crest of the hill, almost opposite their desolated camp, Dan paused, started on and stopped suddenly, holding back a cautioning hand.

They had arrived.

On ahead low voices were heard, and somebody coughed. A shift of wind thinned the smoke pall momentarily, disclosing unburned leaves and down timber.

Picking their way carefully, the two went slowly on, Dan slightly to the left and a yard or so in the lead, a distinction to which his woodsmanship entitled him.

Close ahead now, some one ran lightly for a short distance, and the murmur of low conversation stilled abruptly.

Ominous sign. Dan stopped again.

Yielding to the sun, the fog began to lift, relieving the pressure on the smoke blanket which swayed this way and that, gradually working upward. One after the other trees, bushes, stumps and logs came into view.

Dan caught the sheriff's arm and whispered:

"You stay here. They'll be expectin' us from this direction 'cause they've heered us. I'll circle 'em, an' come in on 'em from behin'. If it's ol' Pappy, I'll spank the ornery, lyin' cuss; if it's somebody that's really bad, we'll have 'em between us."

Trusting implicitly in the judgment of his subordinate, the sheriff nodded an assent, and clapped Dan on the shoulder as the latter stepped off the little trail which they had been following.

Bob fumbled for his red bandanna to wipe his grimy face, then shouted a warning and reached for his holster as his watchful eye caught the blue-steel glint of an automatic poking it's wicked muzzle out of a bush twenty-five yards ahead, pointing straight at him.

The sheriff was quick, but he was not quick enough. In one of those fractions of seconds in which the human mind does fast work, he knew that if the man behind that gun could shoot Bob Forrest was a dead man.

But the issue was not to be decided between them, for with the sheriff's warning cry agile Danny whirled half-right, the light rifle swung down from his shoulder incredibly swiftly, and as it struck his open palm it belched one of those little steel-jacketed pellets, so insignificant looking yet so effective.

A man's form leaped from the bush, tottered, spun around twice and collapsed, writhing among the leaves.

Still on down the path a gigantic negro sprang up to run, stopped with ludicrous suddenness, raised both arms skyward, and came marching gingerly back, even mustering a propitiating grin as he said:

"Dat you, Mistah Dan? Uh-uh, I ain't gwine try to make no gitaway from you all!"

Bob, who had been bending over the fallen man, handcuffed the negro to a sapling, talking as he worked.

"Go tell Luke to drive like —— an' fetch Lem Whitaker, an' two witnesses. Never mind a busted spring or anything, make the ol' wagon do it quick, or not at all. He's goin', an' wants to make a statement.

"No, never mind that gun; for once in your life drop it an' run!"

And, like a thoroughbred and a sticker, Danny ran.

AT four o'clock Colson left his office, that being the closing hour. On the court house portico he paused to observe a truck which turned in on the sacred precincts of the lawn, circled the building and backed up to the basement door.

Danny Simmons stepped down from the rear, followed by a negro in fetters, whom he led inside.

Colson hailed Sheriff Bob, sitting beside Luke, who was driving—

"What the dickens you got, Bob?"

The old officer lowered himself to the grass, and stood rubbing his cramped legs.

"Got that there still, an' two-three hundred gallons shinny. Is Delaney in town yit?"

"Yes. I just saw him in the clerk's office. I'll call him."

Colson stuck his head inside and called:

"Hey Jack! Bob's out here, and wants you!" Then, as footsteps rapidly approached down the hall: "He's got that still, and a nigger, and a cargo of liquor!"

Delaney came out, bustling, officious, superior.

"That's right, unload here, and we'll check it over, and I'll receipt you for it. Git your man too?"

"We did, an' we didn't. Fact is, he showed fight, an' we hed to shoot. Danny killed 'im."

Delaney looked startled, and a little worried. Really killing men had not entered into his calculations.

"What nigger was it, that big blue-gum of Beasley's?"

"That's the boy. He started to run, but

saw Danny with his little gun an' changed his mind."

Colson, who had been frowning on the steps, spoke with unusual asperity:

"See here, Bob, you don't mean to tell me that you found it necessary to shoot Pappy Beasley, do you?"

"Wal, I sh'd say not," replied the sheriff with his provoking drawl which appeared to grow slower whenever any one was waiting anxiously to hear what he had to say. "Pappy was home in bed, I s'pose. Leastwise, the feller Danny shot was J. B. Harrison, alias J. B. Hendricks, alias Tee Bee. Poor little cuss; it appeared a pity to have to shoot 'im, but if Danny hadn't done it, reckon I wouldn't be here."

Delaney scowled, and the odd crooked smile showed.

"Makes a good story, and there will be no trouble to make it stick. The man's dead, so you and Simmons can do all the talking. He won't get a chance to tell his side of it."

Colson looked down from the step uneasily, expecting an outbreak, but the sheriff still leaned against the side of the truck with his feet crossed, and neither Luke nor Danny spoke a word.

"Wal, yes," answered Bob, thoughtfully. "It is a little like you say, an' still it hain't that way, exactly. You see this feller lived 'bout an hour, an'," tapping his breast pocket, "I got his dyin' declaration here, made before a justice an' properly witnessed. He tells all that I hev told you—an' a leetle mite more."

Delaney's eyes narrowed, and his tongue licked dry lips.

"Did he say who—did he implicate anybody else?"

"Wal, yes, reckon ye mout say he did. Of course that's for the courts to decide, but this paper tells how the stuff was run through to the big markets, an' how the money was divided, an' who——"

Delaney whirled, and started to sprint toward a car which stood out in the street, but with an agility not to be expected in one of his weight and years, the old sheriff took two quick steps and tripped the fugitive, then sat on his head and clamped on the gyves, without any consideration whatever for the man underneath. While he worked, he continued his narrative, as if there had been no interruption:

"Ye see, Tee Bee had protection, 'cause Delaney carried the stuff to market in his car, an' if anybody had foun' him with it, all he'd hev to do would be to say that he'd confiscated it, an' was takin' it in to State headquarters."

Colson sat down weakly and looked hard at the sheriff. Finally he shook a forefinger at him and said deliberately:

"You old fox, you had an idea of something like this in the office yesterday. I knew there was something on your mind, you were so infernal quiet.

"Now what caused you to suspect Delaney?"

"Yes, an' how'd you know where that still was?" chimed in Luke.

"Layin' all of that to one side, what I want to know is how you came to spot Tee Bee. You knew 't was him, or you never would have told him about the fire," volunteered Dan.

"Give a man a chanct, kain't ye," drawled the sheriff as he jerked Delaney to his feet, and motioned to the newly arrived jailer to take him inside. "Just don't all speak at onct, an' I'll tell you how the thing worked itself out.

"Fust place, I knowed Delaney like a book, an' was mortal shore that if he really had somethin' on one of Danny's friends he wouldn' sleep 'till he had clamped down on 'im, so when I ast him when he wanted to go arter that still, an' he said in thutty days or so, I 'lowed they was framin' Pappy, cause he's the daddy o' Danny's gal. That mout make it look as if Danny was helpin' 'im out.

"Then I 'lowed that if Delaney was willin' to wait, it mout be that they had more stuff on hand than they wuz willin' to lose, an' wanted to git shut of it fust. The nigger says that's the way it was.

"The rest was simple enough. When the feller went arter that shinny last night, he rid my hoss, an' when I looked 'im over his fetlocks was muddy, an' that was all, so I knowd he had crossed the branch, but not the bayou. They wan't no tracks across the big road, so the whole thing just telled itself, 'thout any figgerin' havin' to be did.

"As to spottin' Tee Bee, I didn' hev to do that either; he done it hisself. All of the rest of the fellers is big rangy fellers, an' he was plumb stunted. When he rid ol' Dick arter that shinny, he couldn' reach the stirrups, so he slipped his feet into the stirrup straps, an' left mud on 'em.

"So ye see, I didn' really do nothin' a-tall 'cept sit aroun' an' let Delaney an' Tee Bee tell me the hull thing. Le's go git suthin' t' eat."

The jailer reappeared, ill at ease.

"Say, Sheriff, that fellow in there is hollerin' for a lawyer, and threatening to have me and you both arrested for interfering with a Government officer. Says we have nothing to do with a Government department, and that he is entitled to his freedom until his case has been disposed of by the Federal court. Says he'll make us sweat some for this."

"What about that, Colson?" inquired Forrest, squinting up at the attorney with twinkling eyes. "I'm just a blunderin' ol' officer, ye know, an' powerful slow to learn. Been thutty year on the job, an' findin' out suthin' new every day. Shall I turn 'im loose?"

"*Br-r-r-p!*" answered Colson, "I'll look up the law on that in the next week or so. Right now I got to go and send a telegram to the United States marshal."

Bob laid a hand on Danny's shoulder and reached into the rear of the truck to fondle the "Walker" dog.

"Right pert pup that," said Old Bob, to no one in particular. "He's young, but he's willin'. He's got a hull lot to larn yit, but he's larnin' it, an' he won't quit when the goin's rough.

"I named him Danny."

SAND and ASHES

by Don Waters

"RED" CAVILL lowered the empty jug from his parched lips. Muttering a thick, mumbled curse, he dropped it limply over the side of the whale boat. Then, slumping down on to one of the thwarts, he watched through his inflamed, sunstruck eyes, the thick stone jug spin around, turn handle down and sink deliberately into the clear green water. Holding his throbbing head in his hands, his cracked and salt-encrusted lips formed the soundless words:

"Tricked, curse them! They've done me!"

This was the end. The long wild road he traveled had run out into this limitless green-blue sea beneath a sun-washed, pitiless sky. The burning orb that blazed above by day, the cold piercing stars that scintillated aloft like serpent's eyes at night, the endless heave and surge of the Pacific beneath—these marked his trail's end.

Alone in the boat, a tiny black speck that heaved up and down on that lonesome world of water beneath the barren, inverted bowl of the sky overhead, Red Cavill cursed the twist of chance that had lured him to his doom. To think that he, who with his crafty, quick mind had slipped so often out of desperate situations, should find himself in such a situation. To think that a coughing, hollow-chested, shell of a man, whose every breath was one more clutch at living, had pilfered his own lease on life. To

think that a venerable, simple looking Quaker captain with his mild manner and his soft-spoken "thee's" and "thou's," could have so cunningly outwitted him. And the wealth he had planned for, killed for and suffered for, turned worthless—sand and ashes. Like a dream it was, the way he had been deluded, yet as Red looked at the canvas sack lying mouth agape on the floor boards of the boat, he knew it was a grim reality.

"Sand and ashes!" he shrilled in a hoarse cackle. "Sand and ashes—and an empty jug. Hee, hee, hee!"

Lower and lower he sank as the sun seemed to concentrate on the whaleboat. The scorching rays had blistered the paint along the gunwales; the rowlocks were hot to the touch and Red Cavill, turning his dull, bloodshot eyes upward, cursed the shining orb that was stretching him mercilessly on the agonizing rack of death. His tortured body writhed under the heat of the Equator.

He crawled painfully under the meager shade of the seat. His brain, as in a fever, was clearer than it had ever been before, and past events shuttled through it; clean cut, vivid pictures rapidly followed one another as the story of his life retold itself, running through his head like molten fire.

How cool was the shade under the oaks at his father's home in England! The night he had left home, disgraced—it seemed but a week ago, so quickly had the years run. A fight in the tavern, a blow struck, a sudden, unthinking knife-thrust, and the man he had slashed stumbling aimlessly around, crying in a queer voice, the raw gash across his cheek spurting scarlet. Then the hurried flight through the night, London, and the ship to Australia. The gold fields. He knew that the little wattle hut must be in ruins now over a pile of whitened bones. They had struck it rich, Red and his "new chum" partner. Gold, a sack of nuggets was their reward. Gold, then home for the new chum.

Why had he started that babble of the hawthorne hedges and green turf of home, in that dry and dusty land? Red hated Australia. He, too, longed for England, his longings were intensified by the knowledge that he never could return. The night before he and the new chum were to start for Melbourne, had been the last for one of them. There were sharp words; the younger man was a fool to have made that shift for his knife. Red had his pistol cocked and turned on him under the table all the time. The loud abrupt crash of the pistol, the acrid powder smell, stopped the other's knife half-way out of the sheath. The look of dumb wonder and surprize on the face of the new chum as he slid limp from his seat like a sack of oats and stretched out on the hard dirt floor came back to Red Cavill vividly.

Next morning, with the moleskin sack of nuggets slung around his neck, Red left the hut in the brush and its still, cold occupant behind him. A week later he was in Melbourne. It was no hard matter to ship out. Every vessel left Australia shorthanded those days, every man trying to get in and few leaving. The lust for gold drew all men inland. The same day he arrived, Red found a berth in a bark bound for the States.

Then came California and a tinhorn gambler. What was his name? Neyley, oh, yes, Jack Neyley. Two hours at cards and the contents of the moleskin sack had changed hands. It was no trouble to get a fight out of Neyley. Just a loud spoken promise that in the morning there would be a meeting at the edge of town. Not armed now, no gun, in the morning the two would meet where no witnesses were there to interfere.

Jack Neyley was a hard man and had a well-won reputation for a tricky fighter. That was a cunning dodge of his, the derringer up his left coat sleeve. Yes, Jack Neyley had played that trick on many a man now dead because of it. Red Cavill was not to be taken that way. Just a few nights before he himself had seen it worked. Quick as the sun flash from a moving mirror, the gambler's left arm had straightened. The derringer, glistening bright, had spurted a raw red flame and as quickly disappeared. In his mind, he could still see Jack Neyley standing easily, his pistol in his right hand, his cold eyes on the red-shirted miner, writhing in his death flurry, his cowhide boots mud-spattered, beating a diminishing tattoo on the barroom floor. Oh, Jack would not fool Red Cavill as he had fooled the score of drink-muddled men who fringed the tables that night.

The gambler never knew that Red spent the rest of the night in the bushes beside the road just outside of the town. He little

realized as he walked through the fog next morning, nonchalantly whistling, that a rifle barrel was pointing toward the sound. A hundred yards off, his form showed wavering and indistinct through the thick mist. Fifty yards and he was plainly in view. Then came a heavy, muffled thump of a Sharp's buffalo rifle. The impact when the slug of lead hit lifted the gambler clear off his feet and spun him half-around. He sprawled with outstretched arms down into the road, the life smashed so suddenly from him that he didn't even hear the sound of the gun that killed him.

But as Red felt over his prostrate body for the nuggets he had lost the night before, he became aware with a guilty start that other ears had heard the shot. A rapid clatter of horses' hoofs rattled hollow and distorted through the fog. In his hurry to reach the bushes, Red left his rifle beside the still figure. That was a false move, for men were known by the guns they carried. A score of miners knew that rifle and a score more had heard the quarrel of the night before.

Concealed, Red peered through the bushes when a dozen riders drew up sharply, stopped, dismounted and examined the dead man. A glimpse of them was enough. Masked they were, and the coil of hemp slung from a saddle pommel told their story. Vigilantes returning from a grim mission. Law and order among the wild and lawless. Red was certain that, once caught, it would mean a short shrift, a sudden swing over the gulley's edge and the feel of rough hemp rasping his throat, the coughing death rattle, the convulsive heave of a hard-dying body.

Before an hour had passed, dodging and hiding when any one drew near, he made his way to the water's edge. A few discreet questions and he discovered several ships were tied up for lack of hands to work them. Gold fever had taken the sailors, who deserted at every opportunity to go to the diggings. The *Abigill*, a whaler, was leaving that very morning.

Red stole a small boat that lay unprotected on the beach, rowed out and soon made his desires known. His business was transacted quickly. The old Quaker captain, Loum Snow, was easily fooled by his story.

Red stirred uneasily in the whaleboat and drew his hand across his hot forehead. Dumbly he wondered; had he really fooled the captain or was he so shorthanded that he was willing to ship any one who offered?

But he was not the only one who fled from the vigilantes, for a half-dozen others signed on that morning and before noon were bending their backs and pumping lustily on the windlass brakes, the rattle of the pawls sounding like sweet music to their ears. The anchor tripped, the headsails shook out, then the courses, followed by the topsails; and with a stiff northeast breeze behind her the *Abigill* sailed the land down low on the horizon by night. As the distance increased from the place where the vigilantes meted out swift justice, as the long, slow days passed, Red began to contrive some method of escape from the boring monotony of a whaler's life.

The rest of the crew also became irked and tired of the ceaseless round of scraping and holystoning. Time hung on each man's hands. Red soon formed a close acquaintance with three of the more dissatisfied of the crew, and the four considered a way to desert to the islands were a man could spend a life of ease.

THE Marquesas Islands were but a short distance off when one morning the lookout at the mast electrified the ship with his long drawn out—

"B-l-o-w-s, ah, b-l-o-w-s!"

The excitement of the chase, the perfect cast of the harpooner, the shouts of the mate as he yelled, "Starn all!" when the whale was lanced, all came back vividly to Red now.

Followed the cutting in, the hoisting of the head aboard, the baling of the case oil, the trying of the blubber. There had been something queer about the whale. He was poor and although he was over seventy feet long he tried out but thirty barrels of oil. A dry whale. That night the whispers of the crew inflamed Red's suspicions. Why had the captain and the mates gone over the side and suspended cutting in before the job was finished? Why had the third mate kept the crew away from the rail for a half an hour? What was in the canvas bag they so carefully carried aft to the cabin?

Not till next morning did Red's unspoken questions find an answer. As he stood his trick at the wheel, a buzz of voices from below came softly to his ears. A word, "ambergris," and he was all attention. The old

bark was on the port tack with the breeze a little forward of the beam. The trade wind blew steadily and the old ship was almost steering herself. Red left the wheel and glanced through the open cabin skylight. Below he saw a group weighing a canvas bag on a steel yard slung to a hook in the cabin carline above. The whispered words, "fifty pounds," reached his acutely strained ears. He saw old Captain Snow slack the bag down and carefully put it in a lower locker on the port side of the cabin.

A slight flap above of the spanker beginning to shiver made Red jump back to the wheel and he brought the vessel back on her course before any one had been the wiser. In a fever of excitement, he finished his trick at the wheel, the thought of that fifty pound sack of ambergris below driving out all other ideas. Here was wealth beyond his wildest dreams, handy, portable, waiting, the chance of a lifetime.

To get possession of that wealth became his obsession. Then slowly into his mind came a cunning scheme. To the other plotters he carefully unfolded it. They would water and provision one of the whaleboats. He would go below and set fire to the staves in the hold that night. During the confusion that would occur when the fire was discovered they would lower away and escape from the ship undetected.

Red neglected to tell the others that he was going to steal the canvas sack of ambergris before he left. He also did not mention that he had concealed a jug of water and some biscuit under a piece of canvas in the stern of the whaleboat. For he was crafty, prepared for any emergency that might turn up.

His scheme worked perfectly but for one thing. Rathway, with his gasping hollow cough, had been sitting forward of the anchor winch when they were making their plans and had heard everything. Rathway, the incompetent, too sick to work, with his red fever flush lighting up his bony cheeks. Rathway, curse him!

Red Cavill twisted uneasily in the bottom of the whaleboat as he thought of Rathway with his pathetic, pain-struck eyes, his long bony fingers, his high cheek-bones and thin sharp nose, a grinning death's head. Ravaged by disease, down to a lean walking skeleton, the clammy breath of death was ever blowing chill on the back of his scrawny neck.

Dying he was, and yet the love of life was strong in his wasted body. Sleeplessly, he punctuated his watch below in the forecastle with his hacking cough, dozing through the day, mournfully gazing out on the world with a faraway look in his faded blue eyes.

Rathway had gone with them. He had threatened to tell old Captain Snow what he knew if they didn't take him. The islands, that was where he wanted to go, to get strong again, to be a well man. He fell in with their scheme readily and agreed to light the staves.

At eight bells, midnight, Rathway crept along the darkened deck, silently slipped off the loose boards covering the hatchway, and set fire among the coopers' reeds and staves. Fifteen minutes passed; then the smell of smoke became strong.

Red ran aft almost to the cabin and yelled—

"Fire, fire in the hold!"

A minute of silence was followed by shouts and orders:

"Rig the pumps!" "Form a bucket line!" "Get off that hatch cover!"

The after cabin emptied as half a dozen men, the captain and mates, scrambled up the narrow companionway and rushed past Red in the darkness.

In the confusion, he slipped below. The cabin was dimly lit up by a smoky whale oil lamp. In the half-light he glanced at the towsled bunks on either side with the blankets flung awry, telling how hastily their occupants had tumbled out at that dreaded cry of fire! He jerked open the lower port locker. His hands felt the canvas bag. His eager fingers pressed against it, soft and yielding, yet solid with little hard spots. Ambergris! Rich he was, the easiest way to wealth he had ever imagined in all his dreams of quickly acquired riches. It really was too easy, like robbing children, but it was his creed that any one who could not protect his own did not deserve consideration.

He slipped back up on deck, slung his heavy sack into the boat, jumped in and pushed it into the sharp stern under the bit of sail cloth. The others followed him and lowered the boat. The excitement on board was their salvation for their absence was not noticed. The other men were for making off to leeward as soon as the whaleboat was clear of the *Abigill*, but Red had taken

charge and, hoisting the sail and lowering the center board, headed up to windward.

"You fools!" he said, "They'll stand right down to leeward as soon as we are missed. Out oars and pull," he ordered.

In frantic haste, the deserters plied their oars while the trade wind shoved them swiftly along. All the night they tugged, making good headway to windward. Morning broke, showing not a sign of the *Abigill* as far as the eye could reach. They were alone on the broad bosom of the Pacific, heaving up and down, up and down, on its long ceaseless swell.

Red was well pleased for his plans had worked out well. Three days before he had heard the first mate speak of the Marquesas Islands but a week's sail away. They were going to put into them for wood and water. By the time the *Abigill* had wasted a day standing down the wind, hunting the whaleboat, they would be safely ashore. The cask of water and biscuits aboard would last nicely. If it didn't however, he would not suffer. That five-gallon jug concealed under him would keep him from thirst.

BUT Red, for all his cunning, could not foresee everything. What went wrong, he would never know. A day passed, two days, then the third and only the sea, heaving and rolling, unbroken by faintest mark of land on its far horizons, met their straining eyes. Squabbles started, and petty bickering that became louder as the water in the cask sank lower and lower.

Whittington had been the cause of the first fight, Whittington, broad-shouldered and bull-necked, with his little pig eyes that blazed like points of fire when he was aroused. Big Whittington turned on Red and berated him fiercely, every other word a slimy oath, every sentence a threat. Red could still hear his voice ringing in his ears, coarse, rasping, vibrating with brute strength.

"The islands! We were to reach them in two days. Curse you, where are the islands?" he shouted as he shaded his eyes from the sun and glared all around.

Red had no more idea where they were than he, but promised him that they would sight land next morning.

Big Whittington answered—

"Ay, tomorrow morning, is it?"

Then, baring his wolflike yellow teeth and shoving his face to within a foot of Red's, he snarled the words:

"Tomorrow morning it is, and if we don't sight the land I'll twist your neck like a fowl's."

With a curse he pushed his two hairy paws against Red's throat; then, backing off, he mumbled:

"Tomorrow, tomorrow morning it is. Land or your neck."

The others sat looking on without word or sign, all by their silence backing up the bully's words. All but Rathway, who had punctuated the conversation with his feeble *hack-hack-hack* of a dying cough.

"Quit it! Quit it!" Big Whittington yelled at the fellow. "Stop that infernal barking, or I'll heave your rattling bones overside now."

As an afterthought, he added:

"And when I shoves him over—" indicating Red—"you go too. That —— cough has got on me. Tomorrow we are rid of the pair."

The long day dragged its hours along. The sun climbed to the top of its arc, slid down, down until its scarlet curved crown dropped below the sea and the stars came out and no sign of land, no distant boom of the surf, met the anxious gaze or the straining ears of the man in the boat.

Big Whittington went to sleep muttering his threats, threats that were never fulfilled. Head thrown back across the gunwale, hairy chest bared, he lay with arms outstretched, making gurgling, clucking sounds deep down in his throat. A stealthy movement, a careful stride or two over the sleeping men, and Red sank his knife hilt-deep into that hairy chest. A louder gurgle followed, a harsher cluck, then a gentle splash as the body slid over the side.

For the rest of the night there was silence except for the little sounds of lapping water against the boat's sides, the *plop-plop* of the flapping sail and the dry, barking cough of Rathway. Morning dawned; daylight brought surprize and consternation at Whittington's absence. Yet no one cared much, although all guessed what had happened. Rathway knew, Rathway, who never slept, had seen what had taken place the night before but not by word or sign did he disclose this knowledge to the others. Yet by the expression in those big, pain-swept eyes Red saw that he knew.

Morning, and the same cloudless sky, the

same blue-green water, unbroken by sail or land, with the whale boat swinging pendulum like on the face of the sea while the four human mites cursed the fate that put them there. The hours lengthened, noon, sweltering noon, with a bare sun riding high above. Red stood at the steering-sweep. He had kept his place there to protect his precious sack from inquisitive hands.

Rathway sat with eyes half-closed, his thin shoulders rising and falling as he sucked his breath gasp by gasp. The two men forward moved back to the middle of the boat. One took up the keg, pulled the wooden plug, tilted it far back and drank. Steeper and steeper, he angled it, the lump in his throat rising and falling. He stopped, gulped his breath hungrily, then started to raise the keg again when the other man grasped it.

An angry glare and the sound of a fist as it struck. A surprized look, a little red spot puffing out and with snarls like animals, the two locked body to body, twisting, falling, rising again, backward they struggled, each trying to shove the other overside. Up on the seat just before Red they stood, strained, two clumsy wrestlers, their faces red with exertion, the cords in their necks standing out, bare-armed, the muscles rippling and rising, grappling for an advantage.

Red waited, watching his chance. Suddenly he lurched his shoulder quickly against the pair as they were poised on the thwart. A yell, a clumsy pitch, and head first the two floundered into the water. Down below the surface they sank. Fainter and fainter the outline of their bodies became, a dark blur that slowly vanished. They never arose.

RATHWAY crouched spellbound, staring at the little bubbles that rose silver like to the face of the water and broke. Amazed, he watched while the boat slowly moved away from the spot. Then, covering his eyes with his hands, he sat without speaking. His thin back bowed, his shoulders heaved and to Red's ears, came that monotonous cough. For a second, Red considered the impulse to pitch the fellow over after the others. Then something stayed him.

Oh, well, he would not have long to stand that maddening cough. Rathway was almost gone, and once he was deprived of water the end would come suddenly. Rathway gone, and the last talebearer disposed of, he would take his treasure store of ambergris and make for land. He had figured what happened. They had sailed to windward to fool old Captain Snow. They were too far north and had sailed past the islands without sighting them. It would be an easy matter to turn back and head more to the southward.

The day passed and with it the last of the water in the keg. That night Red stealthily began to grope for his jug when Rathway stirred, coughed and spoke—

"God, but I'm getting dry!"

Grimly Red said to himself:

"Dry you are, and dryer you'll be before you get any of this water. Wish the fellow would sleep for a minute."

The thought again occured to Red; why not chuck him overboard? But no, he was bound to go soon and Red, as he looked around at the vast sea, cruel, unthinking, impersonal, felt a little shiver run up and down his back-bone. No, it wouldn't do. Die he would, and soon. Rathway was not for long and Red Cavill, who had done more than one man to death, shrank from the thoughts of snuffing out the other's feeble life spark.

One hour dragged after another as the long day passed. Red had swung the boat about and was steering back the way they had come. Five men had sailed on the outward voyage, but two returned. Yet Red felt no pity for the other three since they were strong, able men, fighting men whom he had gotten the best of. But Rathway, weak, sick, dying, was different. If he had but done it, if he had but chucked Rathway into the sea, he might have won out himself.

Red rose up in the whale boat and dully looked around. Empty, unbroken, the sea loomed vast on all sides. Rathway—God, if he had but known—Rathway dying was more dangerous than any of the others alive and strong. The fellow never seemed to sleep. On the second night Red again tried to get out his jug. Not once or twice, but a half-dozen times his eager fingers curled around the handle when Rathway stirred and spoke.

Once it was—

"Look, the stars are bright!"

Another time—

"Listen! I think I hear the surf!"

Still another time, it was just as Red almost had the jug out, when Rathway stood up and, holding himself upright to the mast, pointed that sharp nose of his and, sniffing the cool night air, indicating with his bony forefinger across the port side:

"Land, trees! I smell them!"

Red laughed.

"Go to sleep, man. You're not right. If we were this close to land now, we would have seen it before we turned back. Go to sleep. You're off your head."

But Rathway, if he slept at all, awakened at each movement Red Cavill made toward the jug. The night passed, morning broke on the same endless jumble of water. Not the least thin low-lying gray blur anywhere to mark distant, solid land.

Red was thirsty, yet would not show his jug. No use to share it with a man who would die soon anyway. For two days more, the boat moved along. The pangs of thirst were torturing Red like little hot needle stabs through his body, a dull glowing pain through his head. Rathway, a little paler, his eyes a bit deeper, his skin a parchment drawn tight across his sunken cheeks, still lived, like a mummy miraculously endowed with life. In the wonder of it, Red Cavall was lost with amazement even through his own bodily suffering.

He was fair frantic for water himself. How much more so must that pitiful figure, coughing and gasping for breath, was the question that he insistently asked.

But all things come to an end, man's life itself, fighting, scheming, striving, life itself must go down. For all the long struggle Rathway had put up, the end came quickly. A sharp fit of coughing, a scarlet trickle of blood from out the corners of his mouth, a sudden upward stretching of clenched fists, and Rathway gave up with a sigh that was almost a groan. He dropped sprawling across the gunwale, his head in the water. Like a snake moving over a log, his body followed, slowly slid overboard and to Red's amazed eyes, it rose on a wave, then lay like a twisted lump of seaweed on the surface.

Lost in wonder, Red watched the limp figure that floated face down, watched till the boat had sailed it out of sight, still afloat. Then he greedily reached under him for the jug of water. A drink! How his sticky throat craved the smooth liquid feel of water! He dragged out the jug. There came a look in his face— a look akin to the one he had seen in the face of his new chum partner long ago when his bullet struck fair into his body. A dumb, questioning, wondering stare. The jug was bone dry.

In a flash, he understood, in a swift lightning like comprehension, many things became plain. Rathway, subtle, sly, had known about the jug. During the nights, when Red was asleep, he had quietly contrived to get it out, and little by little, night by night, drank till it was empty. This then was his secret. This was how he had lived so long. While Red suffered for water Rathway was filching from his meager store.

Cursing loudly, Red pulled out the canvas sack. Ambergris—here, at least was tangible wealth. The islands were not far off, couldn't be. He would be rescued and then he would soon forget his sufferings. With trembling hands, he felt the soft, yet solid mass under the coarse canvas. Soft, yet solid with little hard lumps, barely discernible to the pressure of his finger-tips. Ambergris, with small pieces of cuttlefish beaks embedded in it.

With the knife still showing the ruddy brown stains on its hilt, stains of Whittington's heart blood, Red cut the marline that puckered the top together. Another sack showed, another bit of marline closing it. Funny he hadn't noticed a double sack through the skylight. Nervously he cut again, thrust his hand into the bag and drew forth a handful of moist sand and ashes. His heart stood still, his head swam, his dry throat burnt like molten lead.

In a screeching wail his voice cursed loud across the wind-swept sea. He saw it all now. Old Captain Snow had hidden the precious ambergris safely in a secret compartment. Then he had filled the sack with sand from the fire pails and ashes from the cook's galley stove.

Red Cavill picked up the empty jug and dropped it overside.

"Sand and ashes! Hee, hee, hee!" he cackled with the despairing voice of a maniac. "Sand and ashes! Hee, hee, hee! And an empty jug!"

A LITTLE old-fashioned house with a "widow's walk," an open platform with a railing around it on the roof, stands overlooking a harbor where once scores of whaleships fitted out for their voyages. The last whaler sailed long ago

and most of the men who sailed them, are buried in the Quaker church yard close by, each one with an identical low head stone to mark his ordered place, a simple lot without show or ostentation in life or death.

Their deeds are almost forgotten, their records meager. In the dark attic under the widow's walk, covered with the dust of half a century, lies an old musty log book, its writing almost illegible, in many parts wholly erased by the slow finger of time. Mice have gnawed its edges, its cover is tattered, the binding is almost gone.

Midway through the book, the pages are headed with this inscription done in a neat methodical hand, each letter backshaded, each "i" dotted, each "t" crossed:

Bark *Abigill*, Loum Snow, captain, from San Francisco to Marquesas Islands.

On the page below is the record:

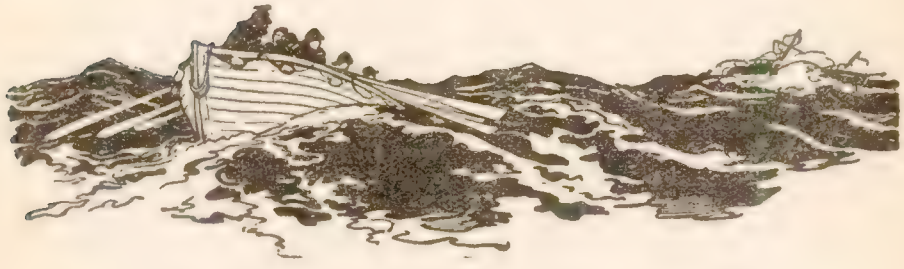
Feb. 1, comes in with light breezes. Port Waist boat, took a bull sperm. Crew employed in cutting in. Found him to be a dry whale. Stopped cutting in and examined. Found a large lump of ambergris. Latter part calm. All hands cutting in and baling case. Thus ends the day. Lat. 5° 30′ S. Long. 38° 40′ W.

Feb. 2, comes in calm. Finished trying out. Only thirty barrels. Weighed ambergris. Fifty pounds. Estimated value about sixteen thousand dollars. Believe Cavill, who I shipped against my better judgment, had left the wheel and was spying as we discussed find in cabin. Must put temptation out of his way. Hid ambergris in secret compartment. Crew employed in trying out. Latter part of day light breezes. Will inform crew of lucky find of ambergris tomorrow. Thus ends the day.

Feb. 3, comes in calm. Fire broke out in hold among barrel staves and cooper's reeds. Do not understand how it started. Soon put out. Found port boat gone. Called crew aft for roll call. Cavill, Whittington, Rathway, Allen, Nye, missing. Deserted during excitement of fire. Stood down to the southwest in search of boat as we believe they would run before the wind for the islands. No sign of boat. Latter part fresh breeze. Thus ends the day. No observation.

For two weeks, the monotonous register goes on, two weeks of searching for the boat, of light breezes and calms, then the record:

Feb. 17, comes in with fresh breezes. Lookout sights boat on starboard bow about five miles distant. Stood down on it. Of the five deserters but one left on board. Cavill. Has been dead for some time. Found him lying down in the bottom of boat, both hands full of the sand and ashes that I had put in sack. Read burial service and talked to crew on the folly of striving for the riches of this world. Verily the way of the transgressor is hard and full many a mortal gives his life for what he finds to be but—sand and ashes. Thus ends the day.



FROM RAMSHOOT TO RÉMY

A Complete Novelette

by Douglas Oliver

Author of "Tub Tobin Repeats," "Queer Fish," etc.

DAVID LAYNE felt he had made a success of his business of talking to men. Now David Layne was a preacher, but he didn't preach. He talked.

"Any success I've had," he would say modestly when pressed for revelation of methods, as he frequently was, "is attributable to the principle which governs my work—the principle of first determining what the men expect you to do, then doing it."

It is not hard to like successful business. David Layne did not find it hard. He liked to talk to his men. Just now his men were conscript chaps. A nasty word, that conscript, yet David Layne talked to the new drafts with the same whole-heartedness of manner he had talked to men long come—and gone—before their time.

David Layne's business made no distinctions; drew no color line. Every night, mess over, he was to be found in the hut lines where men's bodies and men's souls still steamed from a day 'neath burning, blinding sun—from a day of dashing across hard white drill areas that smarted eyes and thickened tongues and dried throats and blistered feet—all incidents in the preparative process which but headed these fellows a step farther along a path it had not been their volition to take.

On the laggard policy of his conscript charges David Layne wasted no sympathy. Indubitably he did not. Why think it of him? Had he not attested almost at the beginning? But with the laggards themselves he did sympathize; wasted it, as some said. Wasted? No! David Layne knew better. He knew men. He knew what the conscript crowd expected of him—these chaps of a strange school, relentlessly pounded from day to day through the mill by hard-eyed, hard-hearted, hard-fisted teachers of the old régime.

"These chaps are human," David Layne was likely to answer occasional criticism, "and they have souls—even as you and I; souls which anticipate the kind word, the friendly hand, the sympathy which it behooves one of my station to supply."

David Layne had been at Ramshoot long enough to know what's what. Some things, now, were not as they once had been. He knew, for instance, that the "Lafe! Lafe! Lafe! Lafe!" of the drill instructors was timed for one hundred and twenty and not one hundred and sixty and sometimes seventy to which it had been stepped up and as untiring drummers now rolled it. This was only one of many digressions from proper procedure at which David Layne lifted a questioning eyebrow; only one of many rubs, he fancied, these new men took from the dirty end of the stick.

So David Layne continued to visit the hut lines; went down each evening when a breeze, stirring in the pinewoods, brought to Ramshoot the first refreshing cool of the long day; went down to talk to the steaming souls of steaming men who, he felt,

needed him as other men, long come-and-gone, had needed him, and who, with no thought of disrespect, called him "good old *padre!*" and slapped him on the back, and clamored—he knew—to have him talk.

"Boys," said David Layne one night to the customary hutful, "life for you will change shortly. A new field——"

"H'ray for that," some enthusiast piped. "Anything but this stinking parade ground."

David Layne raised a deprecating hand.

"Steady, there," he said. "Hard language gets you nowhere. The training here may be stiffer——"

A bedlam of cries:

"You said it, *Padre.*"

"I'll tell the world."

"You know it, *Padre.*"

"That ain't the half of it, dearie."

David Layne paused good-naturedly until the barrage of interruption had let down, then went on:

"Stiffer, I was going to say, boys, than most camps. But it fits you——"

"For the scrap heap," whined a man. "If they don't get us out of here soon we won't have any legs left to stand on."

"They sure hammered us today," spoke up another.

"Hammer?" said the whining one. "Hammer don't describe it a-tall. They doggone near killed me."

He gingerly fingered his bare heels, which puffed with blisters the size of cart wheels. "I'd like to get that knock-kneed sarge alone some place, some night. Somebody else'd do some hammering—an' don't you forget it."

David Layne still smiled. Spite, like boils, he knew, had to work out of men's systems. Attempts to check it or them, too suddenly, but aggravated the sore spots. His moment for business would come later, he told himself. It did. Some soul inquired:

"Say, *Padre*, will you settle something for us? All right. It's this: Drader says we're well off, here; that we don't know what we're walking into. He says the off'cers we'll get in France are a hardboiled bunch—worse than here."

David Layne laughed divertingly. "On what evidence, may I inquire," he said, "does Drader base his supposition?"

From the back of the hut some one cried:

"That's callin' his bluff, *Padre.* Put up or shut up, Drade."

The fellow called Drader—he of the whining voice—dug down in his serge and produced a dirty letter.

"This," he declared, holding it up for David Layne's inspection, "is from my cousin. He's with the Bull Moose—over there. Been with them for a dog's age too. Guess he ought to know. Will I read it?"

David Layne looked around.

"Naw!" protested a mild-eyed fellow at his elbow. "We don't wanna listen t'it again, *Padre.* It's 'bout a killer——"

"That's enough," interrupted David Layne. "Blood and thunder, boys?"

Several heads nodded confirmation. David Layne picked up the threads of his argument.

"Boys," he said, "you must not let yourselves be influenced by alarming stories from the front. Half the time they're but products of fertile imagination."

David Layne had heard terrible tales, too. Some of them he knew to be true. But it wasn't his policy to let these boys believe in them.

"That's tellin' him, *Padre*," he heard some one yell. "'Magine Drader tryin' to put that guff across on us——"

"Steady there," smiled David Layne knowingly.

He winked at the hutful, adding:

"Drade and his cousin have been dreaming, that's what. The officers you'll meet up with in France aren't inclined to killing. They're not barbarians."

The fellow called Drader looked up from the pages of the letter lying on his knee. Said he, coldly persistent—

"My cousin says——"

David Layne playfully stamped the floor for silence.

"Get over it, Drader," he said.

To the hut:

"Let's sing, boys. Ten minutes to 'Lights Out!' What shall we sing? 'Harvest Moon?' All right! Come on; all together now."

"Shine on, shine on, harvest moon
Up in the ske—y——"

The fellow called Drader had thrust the letter back in his pocket; had scraped to his feet.

"I ain't had no lovin' since
Ape—ru—el, Jan-a-wary, Joon—or J'ly-y-y-yy"

"Slam!"

The fellow called Drader had slammed

the door peevishly. After him the songsters flung—

"Sorehead, you."

David Layne shook his head, saying: "He'll get over it," waved his arms jerkily and swung the bunch into the homestretch of the old favorite.

"Snowtime ain't no time to sit
Outside an' spoo-o-o-o-on-nn"

Far down the hut lines a bugle blared authoritatively.

"Hustle it," said David Layne. "There she goes——"

"So shi-i-ine on, shine on, harv-est moon,
For me an' my gal-l-l-l-l-l-l-l."

Outside the door David Layne halted on the top step as invariably he halted there on occasions of this kind. To his ears there drifted from within:

"Not much of an arg'ment, was there? The 'pad' knocked Drader cock-eyed, didn't he?"

Laughter!

Music it was to David Layne's ears. With a little purr of satisfaction he stepped down into the night.

II

THE First Reserve officers were at dinner.

An odd lot they were, from "Fatty," the C. O., down to the junior subaltern; chaps who had seen service a-plenty; chaps who had yet to duck their first "crump;" chaps whose sleeves flashed a rainbow of colors; chaps whose sleeves had never sported battle patches; old men with no ambition; old men whose years permitted no return to France; young men who hourly awaited the orderly room summons which meant but one thing—"fightin' order;" young men who flitted like butterflies from one Ramshoot area to another, sipping a thrill from the specialist jobs for which they had industriously trained and which, as they would have it known, prevented them from going out to the Dirty Third or the Iron Sixth or the Bull Moose or any one of the innumerable crack units they had once set up—and they still maintained it—as their goal of ambition.

David Layne came in to dinner. Usually he sat on the left of the C. O. This night his chair was occupied. A young fellow, twenty-three or four at the most, had usurped the post.

Fatty, the C. O., hailed him.

"*Padre*," he said, "shake hands with Batch. The major's over on leave. Just dropped in to say 'lo! Major Batch—Captain Layne."

They shook hands. David Layne found a vacant chair. Over his soup he surveyed the visitor. He liked to size men up. It was part of his business. He knew he wasn't going to like this stripling. At the start he had not fancied his handshake. Limp! He liked fellows who squashed your fingers and slapped your back as did the Rotary gang back home.

Nor did he fancy the fellow's appearance. The fellow's tunic, for instance! It had leather elbows and ringlets of leather about the wrists. It was greasy. The patches needed sewing. Buttons and badges weren't any too bright either.

Breeks? David Layne could not see the fellow's breeks, for the table hid them. They probably were ripped at the knees and baggy, and as dirty as the upper half of the uniform. He thought that Batch might have had the decency to turn himself out properly. Cleanliness was next to godliness. Out of respect for the mess and his host, Batch, at least, might have shaved.

With coffee the lights came on. The little band which had been playing beneath the mess windows for one steady hour tucked their instruments under their arms and went down to bed. Fatty pulled a black cigar from his face, blew smoke to the ceiling and rose, applauded, to his feet.

"Gentlemen," he said, "we have with us——"

And that's as far as he got.

From the hut lines came wild shouting which stopped the C.O. short and brought the mess up on its legs. The shouting was followed by the dull crash of wood, the sharper crash of glass and the bang of slamming doors. Almost immediately more cries, startling in their intensity, broke across the night.

For days the camp had fretted under the strain of awaiting a move order, which seemingly would never come. Leave had been canceled. Pay had been stopped. The first draft was all set to go out. It had been set for some time. Men had grown tired of asking when—of figuring when—of listening to such vague, cheerless replies as

"Tomorrow maybe," or "The day after perhaps" or "Thursday; who knows?"

They had grown tired, indeed, of waiting; of champing under the tightened reins of draft discipline which permitted no money —no freedom—and to their prejudiced thinking, no nothing. Now, as the First Reserve officers, from Fatty down to the junior subaltern, realized, these men were breaking wood—or breaking glass—or breaking heads perhaps.

"Orderly officer!" bellowed Fatty.

No reply! Some one tendered the information that the orderly officer had been excused.

Fatty looked around beseechingly. Funny sounds were issuing from his puffy throat.

"Somebody's got to go down there," he said. "At once too."

David Layne pushed back his coffee. Said he, slowly:

"I don't think there is any need for worry, sir. Ruffled feelings are easily smoothed out. Your permission, sir? I shall go down to the lines."

Fatty watched him stride from the room.

"What do you think of that, Batch?" he asked of the stripling on his left.

"Hmmm!" said Batch, unconsciously flicking with his hand the frayed ribbon on his breast. "I don't quite get it. The good Samaritan, eh? Say! Let's go down and see him work."

At the hut lines David Layne met up with an excited crowd.

"What's wrong?" he asked mildly.

A dozen tongues told him what was wrong. The fellow called Drader had started it. He had got a gang together. They had crawled under the canteen; beneath the floor of the room where the beer was on tap. Some one had provided a brace and bit. They had bored holes through the floor; they had bored right into the kegs themselves. Beer, which for lack of money had been denied them for days, was now theirs for the trouble of draining it off and carrying it away. They had been discovered.

A canteen worker had accosted Drader and had got slugged in the jaw for his interference. The guard had been called out. The guard had done nothing. Drader and his cronies had barricaded themselves in a hut. From behind the barricade they were hurling defies to the camp in general.

The crowd pressed closely on David Layne's heels as he made his way to the storm center. He mounted the steps of the barricaded hut. He saw a broken window. Craning his neck, he tried to look within. Something whizzed past his head.

"I told you—look out!" cried some one in the crowd. "These birds are ugly. They mean business."

Undaunted, David Layne rapped on the door.

"Who's there?" The whine of Drader's voice was manifest.

"It's your *padre*—Captain Layne."

"Well, what do *you* want?"

"Boys, I want you to be sensible. Come out of it. Shake yourselves."

"Wha' for? Think we're lousy?"

"Boys, listen to me. I am speaking in your interests. For your own good. I want you to open this door. Let me in. I want to talk to you."

"Talk's cheap. You've talked to us for the last time."

"Boys——"

"Boys, ——! We ain't kids no longer. Remember that, will you? And, say, get off that stoop or we'll crown you right the next time you go mugging round that window."

David Layne felt disquiet stir within him.

"Boys—" he reiterated his appeal.

"You go to ——, you windjammer," came Drader's reply. "You don't believe what others tell. You made my cousin out a liar. Why should we listen to you? What d'you know 'bout over there anyway? You ain't seen no scrapping, have you?"

David Layne stepped back in amazement. He knew his knees were trembling. He knew his forehead to be moist with sweat. Cold sweat, too. Why, he wasn't afraid, was he? He couldn't be afraid. No! He would try again.

"You boys," he implored, "must desist. This will avail you nothing. Out of respect for your king——"

"Take him to —— along with you," came Drader's defy.

There was a gasp from the crowd; further gasping as an unfamiliar voice rasped:

"Let me up there. This has gone far enough."

David Layne made room for the stripling, Batch.

"Get down," ordered Batch curtly. "There's only one way to handle these pups."

Major Batch first rid himself of his tunic, tossing it to the crowd, remarking:

"Look after that; will you? It's my one and only."

Next he called for a club, which was quickly supplied him. Then he tapped incisively upon the door.

"I'm coming in this hut in about two minutes," he rasped, "and I don't want one of you to so much as raise a hand against me. If you do, I'll knock your —— brains out for you."

Within feet scraped across the rough floor. Drader and his cronies could be heard mumbling. Then—

"Who's it?"

"Why," rasped Batch, "they call me the Killer where I come from. P'rhaps you've heard of me before this."

Silence! Then Drader's whine crept out—

"You're bluffing."

"You think so?" said Batch. "Well, think again. I'm coming in by the window."

The threat had scarcely passed his lips when he leaped sidewise for the window. His fingers hooked on the ledge. For a second he dangled there while the crowd cried—

"Watch out for their bayonets."

Then he pulled himself up; got a knee braced on the ledge. He brought his stick down against the fragments of glass. Inside they fell with tinkling sounds. In after them fell the stripling stranger.

"Back up there—in that corner," the expectant crowd heard him shout.

Thump-thump-thump of feet on the flooring. Then Batch's voice again:

"I thought you would."

Wide-eyed, breath bated, the crowd waited. Presently the stripling's face appeared at the window. He asked for assistance in moving the door barricade. Everywhere men sprang to his call. Drader and his company were dragged to view. The guard, now that the trouble-makers had been tripped, fastened on them willingly enough. Onlookers swarmed about. Batch was saying:

"And, since I've my tunic off—and we're man to man—I might as well finish the job. You—" and he pointed straight at Drader—"have something to take back."

"I said nothing," replied Drader, glowering down upon Batch.

"Yes, you did," snapped Batch. "That king business—you don't forget what you said about the king."

Drader looked defiant. The stripling shoved up against him.

"I said," he rasped, "take it back—or I'll smash you."

"I won't do nothing," Drader grunted his disregard.

"Get your hands up—fight," commanded Batch.

"I won't."

"Smack!"

Drader reeled and went to his knees. But he did not get up until one of the guard dragged him up.

"Any others?" asked Batch, as he held out his hands for his tunic. There was no answer from the open-mouthed crowd.

Fatty, the C.O., and Batch and David Layne strolled back together to the mess.

"Well," said Fatty, "that wound up peaceably enough after all."

"Yes! thank ——," breathed David Layne aloud.

There was a mutter from the stripling. He wheeled on David Layne, saying:

"Why thank Him? Thank me."

Late that night the move order came. The first draft went out. Hustle and bustle! David Layne had not slept. Now, as he detected the *swush-swush-swush-swush!* of marching feet he got up, fidgeting. By the blowing curtains he waited; waited as he had waited in the past when other drafts had gone out; waited for the shrill cry of "Three an' a tiger for the *Padre*, gang; three an' a tiger."

But there was no cheering; only the pound of fours along the road to Hiphook where toy trains with funny whistles and packing-box cars awaited the assemblage of the human freight they presently would drag across the south of England to some channel quay.

After a while David Layne crept back to his blankets to toss and turn some more.

III

DISILLUSION walks in various guises. To some it comes paralyzingly swift like the Cobbian crack of bat against ball. Beneath the skin of others it eats away like some slow poison until character and principle are set a-totter on their pedestals.

David Layne belonged to the latter class.

Instinctively he knew there to be upon the wall the handwriting he fought doggedly for days to prevent his eyes from seeing. Then more drafts went out; "*swush-swush!*" on the Hiphook road but no three-and-a-tiger. David Layne knew then; saw then. Slow poison had got him. Slow—yet paralyzing.

In one respect David Layne was to differ from others of his class. With him character was the first to totter. From the stone floor of the jail pen on which he lay the fellow called Drader said to him:

"When a guy's drunk he usually says what he thinks; tells the truth. I was crocked that night—and I'm still a bit hazy. But—if I said anything to you, I meant it."

David Layne winced, but managed to reply—

"But leaving that aside, Drader, have I not helped you boys?"

Drader pulled himself up on his elbow.

"Mebbe," he admitted. "Mebbe if your idea o' help is namby-pambyin' us and sendin' us out to France with a lot o' wrong ideas."

"Just what do you infer?"

Drader spat vehemently against the wall.

"We know—we conscripts do," he said, "that we're in wrong. That we'll get blazes once we're over there. Nobody'll have any use for us. We stayed out of the mess as long as we could, and I guess we'll be showed plain enough that we stayed too —— long for our own good."

David Layne shook his head.

"No?" flared Drader. "Well, look at that Batch guy, will you? Look what he done to me? Slugged me after I'd given up. What do you say to that?"

The face of David Layne worked peculiarly. A queer light came into his eyes. His lips curled. 'Way down deep within him self-respect strove to avert the catastrophe. But self-respect strove uselessly. The pedestal was tottering; character was slipping from him.

"And yet," he said pettily, "you men renounce all I have done for you—my sympathy—my many kindnesses—for this fellow's——"

Drader snorted his disgust:

"Well, Batch's no idol o' mine. Let the rest think what they like."

David Layne's eyes smarted with pricked pride.

"He didn't do so very much that night anyway, did he?" he asked eagerly.

"Mebbe not—but have it your own way," said Drader strangely. "You always have had."

Twisting himself in his blankets, he rolled on his side again.

"I want some sleep," he whined. "There's a limit to afternoon calls. You might remember I didn't ask you to see me in the first place."

Day after day! Week after week! The next month dragged in. David Layne stumbled through the few tasks his office exacted of him. Officers around the reserve commenced to speculate.

"What's the matter with Layne?" they asked.

Layne had gone all to pieces, they said. They didn't realize that his principle, too, had been dragged down when character crashed. No principle now governed his work. It is not difficult to sour on bad business, and David Layne had soured on his. He rarely visited the hut lines. His Sunday services were tiring things through which officers and men sat itching for the band's rendering of "God Save the King" and relief from boredom.

"Layne's lost his grip," decided Fatty, the C.O. "Gone stale. Too long in one spot. He needs a change of scenery."

In time the strings were pulled. One morning at breakfast Fatty announced the change.

"*Padre*," he said, complacently, "you're going to France next week."

"I beg your pardon, sir," said David Layne nervously.

"To France," droned Fatty. "To a crack outfit. A man's crowd."

David Layne let go his knife. It jangled irritatingly across his plate.

"I don't quite understand," he said slowly, feeling that every eye in the mess was upon him.

"But I do," smiled Fatty, and was off on a new tack.

Dragging his chair around, he said:

"Batch's got another bar to his cross. That's two now. Can you beat it? They wanted to give him the V.C. Recommended it, I believe. But Batch wouldn't listen to it. Would rather have a M.C. with a lot of bars. More distinctive, or something like that, he claims."

"Good lord!" exclaimed a mess member.

"That's a good one. Do you happen to know what he pulled off this time?"

Fatty leaned back in his seat, replying:

"Ran amuck in a sunken road, I believe. Went in alone with a Lewis, firing from the hip. Bunch of heinies at the far end got in the way; had their hands up, too. But that didn't stop Batch. No, sir! He had some farther to go—so he didn't take any prisoners."

The mess room rocked with laughter.

"He's the limit," some one said.

Irritation in the form of beads of perspiration stood out from David Layne's brow. Batch? Always Batch. First the men. Now the officers. Would they never stop talking of that stripling? He got to his feet, mechanically. As from afar he heard his own voice say:

"There is nothing laughable, gentlemen, about that incident. That was a butcher's —a killer's—trick. Can you show me—any of you—God's handiwork in a thing like that?"

Silence! Only the *tick-tick* of an entrapped bumblebee beating against the window-glass.

Presently Fatty's chair creaked. Fatty said:

"But, *Padre*—we were speaking of—of guts. You understand?"

A nasty word, that guts—a word that he did not understand, David Layne told himself. Ugh! he muttered. Was there no way out? Suddenly he felt imprisoned, trapped like that insect thing, tick-ticking on the window-pane.

IV

FROM Ramshoot to Rémy is a far cry. Not in actual distance perhaps; but in time required to span that distance unquestionably so. And many things can happen between Ramshoot and Rémy as they happened to David Layne.

Fiction would have started David Layne afresh; would have cast off for him the shackles which held him down and would have fired his eye with the resolve to reach out and pluck the promise of the new world and new life opening out to him. But fact also demands consideration, and fact revealed to David Layne little promise in a sticky, gray mist which smeared itself like paste over everything or in the pitching boat on which he huddled, marrow-chilled, and at whose lurching rail officers and other ranks, women and girls, great and near-great alike, retched and retched until it seemed stomachs, themselves, would be the next to go.

The side wheeler shook and shivered. The channel boomed. Intermittently a siren somewhere blew deafening, dismal blasts. Duty officers—poor unfortunates who had not escaped the eyes of the embarkation cranks—staggered the deck beneath the weight of responsibility of maintaining ship's discipline that had been thrust upon them.

"Keep clear of that rope," one of the duty dubs told David Layne for the third or fourth time.

The latter only grunted. It had not been his intention to roll on the confounded rope. The ship was playing pranks and——

"Tell the fellow to jump in the lake," came a cheery voice.

Looking up, David Layne saw, crawling over a pile of kits toward him, a rosy-cheeked little man who banged down, uninvited, at his side.

"My name's Trumpeter," announced the little man. "I've been looking around for you. Understand you're going out to my brigade. Thought we might as well trot along together."

The little man gave David Layne no chance for a word but bubbled on, unceasingly, like some mountain spring: "Your name's Layne, isn't it? Thought so. Sorry you feel so rotten, Layne. Never bothers me. This is my third crossing. Up to London for fourteen days. Great place, London. Only city. I cut loose, believe me, for a few days. Everybody cuts loose, sooner or later. Out here—they sort of expect it of you."

David Layne was glad when they docked. The day was still muggy, and, of the French port, he could make out but little. Nevertheless a mighty feeling of relief surged over him as once again his feet found firm footing.

"This way," called Trumpeter, and David Layne found himself shoving for position in a queue of officers rapidly forming. Men pushed this way and that. He stood his ground and pushed, too.

Somebody tapped him on the shoulder. "For duty, you," called the somebody. David Layne did not comprehend. "For

duty," repeated the disembarkation crank. Then the crank's eyes fastened on David Layne's collar badges. "Beg pardon, *Padre*," he exclaimed, and turned away.

Little Trumpeter winked. "Great thing," he said, "to be a noncombatant, eh? Gets you out of some messy jobs."

After years, it seemed, of moving up, of stepping on the other fellow's heels and having his own stepped on, David Layne reached the goal—a window through which he thrust his papers for stamping and from which the information was bawled that a train would leave within five minutes and that he'd have to do some tall stepping to make connections.

"Where shall I find it?" asked David Layne.

"——!" came comment from back of the window. "Listen to that, Bill, will you? Where'll he find it? *Why—in the station*—you. What're stations for?"

"But," asked David Layne, "where shall I find the station?"

"Get away from that window. Do you want all day to yourself? Next man. Step up there."

It was Trumpeter who piloted David Layne to the station; it was Trumpeter who looked after kit and other details, and Trumpeter who waved his hands before a grinning French railway porter from whom was elicited further information that no train for the north would leave within the next hour.

"As I expected," declared Trumpeter with an air of knowing everything worth knowing. "That hour means two hours, likely. Just an example, Layne, of the harmony existing 'tween our French friends and us. We run the railroads, or think we do. We fix train schedules. The French endorse them. We schedule a train for, say, two o'clock. The French O.K. it. But they pull that train out anywhere from ten minutes to ten hours off schedule just to show us who owns the —— (you'll pardon me, Layne) the —— train after all."

David Layne fell to studying this little man and his self-possession; his breezy way, before which little obstacles crumpled up like the moth in the candle flame. Trumpeter, he felt, was not such a bad fellow after all. Trumpeter knew the ropes; certainly did. It wouldn't be a bad plan, he reflected, to trot along with a fellow who knew the ropes—who knew everything worth knowing.

"Stand a bite to eat?" inquired Trumpeter presently. "I could; I'm always hungry after crossing."

"A little perhaps," smiled David Layne.

They found a café on a side street near the station. A sour smell greeted their nostrils as they stamped within.

"Ooofs—and 'bokoo' them," Trumpeter called loudly.

At the far side of the room a door opened quietly. A girl came in. She had bobbed hair and sparkling, black eyes which snapped warm welcome to her patrons. There were silver buckles on her twinkling feet. These gave off a musical clink as she walked.

"*Et vin, m'sieu'?*" she inquired with a little toss of her head.

"I'll say so," grinned Trumpeter. "And anything stronger you may happen to have, kid."

The girl clinked back to the kitchen, where she sang "Madelon" in a high-pitched voice, and from which shortly she emerged bearing her cooking. There were eggs, mussy looking things, and potato slices, dripping fat, and in pipe-stemmed glasses an amber stuff as sparkling as the girl's eyes.

David Layne felt no savor for the cooking. He felt rather nauseated. He watched Trumpeter down the amber stuff with evident relish; watched him flash amorous glances to the girl in black. The girl was taking the situation good-naturedly enough; even kept up her end of the badinage. In response to Trumpeter's flattery she pulled a wry face, remarking:

"*Pas bon, Canajen officiers. Pas bon.* It ees Portagee officiers—*bon. Canajen officiers*——"

And she shook her bobbed head dolefully.

"I'll teach you to love those perfumers," laughed Trumpeter, and he jumped up from the table, upsetting things with a crash.

"*Non! Non, m'sieu!*" protested the girl as Trumpeter clutched at her hands; secured them; dragged the girl to him.

David Layne got up hurriedly; stamped out of the room and the smell on to the street. Through the mist he groped his way back to the station. After a short time Trumpeter rejoined him.

"Sorry, Layne," he said, although there was no apology in his tone. "I forgot—for the moment—your line of business. Forgot you were new to this—this life. But——"

David Layne nodded.

"But," calmly continued the little man, "sooner or later you'll learn. Layne, you look fagged. Sort of dead about the eyes. As though you've come through a hard knock. A little livening up wouldn't hurt you any, I'll bet. Say! Wasn't she the real thing, that girl? But you're on her bad books, Layne. You didn't take your liquor, did you?"

David Layne did not reply. Still, he reflected, he'd be mighty glad when he had rid himself of that tight feeling in his throat—and the dead feeling about his eyes.

V

AFTER Boulogne came "Eat-Apples" with its bullring of torture for timid souls and its gas chamber into which went David Layne. He went alone. Inside he found deathly silence. There was no light. The nose-clip pinched. He could feel sweat on his forehead. As he breathed, the canister from which he breathed, gave off gurgling noises. Saliva trickled from his mouth past the rubber piece on which he'd clamped his teeth, and down his chin. There in the gloom and hush of the gas chamber the old trembling gripped his knees.

Test over, he stumbled into the sunshine, clutching at the head straps of his mask. Jerking the goggly thing from him, he leaned limply against the metal wall of the chamber. His face was very white.

"You're all right," grinned the gas N.C.O. who had put thousands through the same test. "Every one thinks the gas is getting to him, first time through."

Little Trumpeter, who had walked down from base depot to keep David Layne company, threw an arm about the latter's shoulders.

"You weren't afraid—surely?" he asked.

"No! No! Of course I wasn't," David Layne objected strongly to the suggestion; but just the same he felt that his denial sounded flat. White-lipped, he looked up to meet Trumpeter's searching gaze.

"What you need, Layne," said the little man, "is a good shot of brandy. That's the stuff for nerves."

"No! No!" said David Layne. "I'll be myself shortly."

A day's journey ahead was staging camp. A brief word for the place—dull, lifeless town meriting little or no attention. A solitary street started with the railway line and climbed by degrees to the top of a hill where squatted another sleepy village. To this camp came officers and men, as David Layne and Trumpeter had come, who messed below and slept above and in between times and places did nothing for the simple reason that there was nothing to do.

David Layne and Trumpeter climbed the hill near the close of an afternoon when the sinking sun cast long, purple shadows across the valley bottom. Away down the valley nestled an aerodrome whose white hangars stood out against the green background like monster mushrooms.

David Layne permitted his eyes to feast on the beauty of the scene.

"I could loaf here contentedly," he said.

"Loaf?" little Trumpeter caught him up. "Is that your intention, *Padre*?"

David Layne passed a hand over his tired eyes.

"I don't mean on my job," he said hesitatingly.

Trumpeter climbed on, gaze intent upon the distant hangars from which was borne to them a buzz-saw drone of engines and from which two shimmering planes presently took off. But after a while he slowly turned, saying:

"You've simply got to take something for that trouble of yours, *Padre*. I mean it."

At mess that evening Trumpeter drank more than was good for him. David Layne thought so. Trumpeter wouldn't listen to him, however, but kept chanting something about

" 'Morrer I go—where the crumps-crumps blow —hang expense—let's drink 'gain."

David Layne grew tired of the maudlin thing and went outside. The air was chilly. Overhead a few stars glinted dully like steel filings. From out of the distance came a faint hum. A horse and cart clacked noisily by.

David Layne drew back in the shadow of a building. He commenced to think. Of the past; and of the future. The past, he told himself, was buried. The future? Let the future take care of itself. There was the present to be considered. The present suited him. Why worry, now, about the future or the demands it would make upon him?

The clacking of the cart had died away; but there was another sound now. It was

the sound of great wings droning through the sky-spaces. Momentarily David Layne was at a loss for understanding. Then came a banging, crashing sound up by the aerodrome he could not help interpreting.

Down the street a woman's voice shrilled—

"Boche!"

David Layne stepped out from the wall. He heard more voices. Feet scampered past him up and down street.

"Grrrum! Grrrum!"

Dull banging along the peaceful valley-bottom where the hangars nestled.

From out of the heavens dropped a pale-yellow flare. It fell lightly, slowly, like wandering thistle-down. From above it came another growl of engines.

"Grrrum! Grrrum! Grrrum!"

Now little golden birds—strings of them—were darting up from the ground to worry the growling thing. David Layne had not seen tracer bullets before, and his eyes were fascinated by them.

Farther away he heard the *"Pomp-seooo! Pomp-seooo!"* of an anti-aircraft gun whose acquaintance he was also making for the first time; and he saw pinpoint flashes of orange up amongst the star filings.

"Here I come! Here I come!"

To David Layne's ears the growl of the Gotha sounded like that. Behind him a voice shouted—

"Headed this way."

A whistle blew.

"Duck," yelled the same voice.

All of a sudden David Layne grew panicky. The growl was right overhead. He heard doors slam. He'd have to find cover. Instinct told him that. But where?

There was a terrific shriek that seemed to suck him off his feet. A short distance uphill, flame leaped from the street. For David Layne the world seemed to dissolve in one awful, grinding crash. He picked himself up; ran; butted blindly against a door. It tipped open. Pitch black within. No! A light showed. Stairs? Yes! He stumbled inside, tripped, stepped into space, and fell headlong down the stairs.

Shaking all over, he pulled himself to his knees. He tried to get a grip on himself but couldn't. The old feeling was there; only a hundred times worse. Facing him squatted a hag-like woman with three whimpering kids tugging at her skirts. The woman shook her fist at a distant *"Grrum!"* then turned her attention to David Layne.

"Ici," she said, and dragged from under her a thin-necked bottle.

She also found a battered cup which she filled with a sparkling something from the bottle.

"Le voilà!" she murmured, and held it out to him.

David Layne gestured his refusal. *"Le voilà!"* the woman persisted. *"Bon! Bon!"*

Again he refused. He knew what the cup contained. Trumpeter had argued, early and late, its benefit in nerve cases——

Unexpectedly senses reeled. The walls of the cellar danced. The ceiling was dropping upon him. His head fell back. He was hazily conscious that biting stuff was getting between his teeth, onto his tongue, and down his throat. He felt like choking. Blackness!

After minutes David Layne heaved a sigh. As he sat up the woman dropped her arm from his neck. On the floor she placed the tin cup, murmuring sympathetically—

"Pauvre—pauvre officier!"

David Layne got to his feet.

"Ugh!" he was about to exclaim.

But he didn't, for he felt tingly.

He looked at the muddy-faced woman for enlightenment. She held up the bottle. Was that it? he asked himself. Again she offered the cup to him. David Layne drew back.

"Non, merci," he said and started up the stairs.

He didn't want any more of the stuff. Goodness knows how much of it the woman already had forced between his lips. Still, he couldn't help observing how lightly he walked; how clear his brain seemed. Even the dead feeling had quit his eyes. And he wasn't trembling. He wasn't afraid.

On the street Trumpeter came running up.

"Thought you were done for, *Padre,*" he said rather thickly.

"Oh, I'm all right," said David Layne brightly.

Trumpeter planted himself in front of him, sniffing suspiciously.

"Well," he ejaculated wonder, "if you aren't the sly dog, Layne, I miss my guess. Why! I never dreamt it. Where do you keep it?"

David Layne smiled. He couldn't help smiling. And then very broadly he said, "Sssh!" and stamped back to the mess.

It was a good joke. Let Trumpeter and

the rest think what they thought. He'd keep quiet. There was nothing to worry about. Of his own volition he had not betrayed either his creed or conscience. He had not wilfully erred.

Let Trumpeter think him a sly dog. It was rich. He'd let them think what they wanted to. The stuff, he had to admit, had soothed his nerves. But it hadn't hurt him any. And he certainly did not have to resort to it in future. He certainly didn't.

VI

THE land of his future!

A land where the hob-nailed boots of war had long trodden without contrition—a land which obviously enough held out little promise, if any, to any one. After a morning of it David Layne asked himself whether there would ever be a let-up to pockmarked fields and sagging furrows and crumbled ghosts of old towns and tangled wire and treeless roads and the smell from rotting horses by the roads which got in a fellow's nostrils and turned a fellow's stomach. Would there ever be an end to great, gray gas bags, strung across the sky; to the far-up buzz of silver planes; to the rumble along the pave of lorries and wagons and carts; to the dull, intermittent beat, up ahead, of guns?

At Brigade—another sprawl of ruins in another pockmarked field—David Layne said good-by to Trumpeter. The little man said:

"Sorry, *Padre*, but this is where we part company. And sorrier, I am, that you must go straight up to your unit."

He paused deliberately.

"Take this," he went on, pushing something flat and shiny into David Layne's hands. "Now that you're accustomed to it it may help you out of some awkward situations. And—if you need more, any time, just look me up."

David Layne flushed at the sight of the shiny thing.

"Why, Trump," he remonstrated, "I couldn't think of it. I couldn't——"

"G'wan with you," grinned Trumpeter and slapped him on the back. "Lord knows, you may need it," he said. "Listen to that."

David Layne strained his ears. Away up the ribbon-like road on which they stood, somewhere beyond its dip into the skyline, there was a steady rumbling.

"Big smash on," said Trumpeter. "Oh, yes! Your destination. Let's see."

A map rustled in his hands.

"Straight up the road," he said, "till you come to a town on a canal. Wamillies! That's it."

Late in the day David Layne came to a knoll overlooking a broad, glacis-like slope bisected by a fragmentary trench line. Farther down he could make out a curling ribbon of water, gunmetal in color, which skirted a battered village, so battered that a half-decent shove, it appeared, would send it clattering down about its ears. Over the village innumerable white bubbles were breaking.

David Layne had yet to duck a crump; but he knew instinctively that to go down to Wamillies and the bubbling there, was but to court disaster. So he fell out by the wayside, waiting there while the sun dropped lower, and as up from the canal, past him, streamed ambulances and panting horses and pack mules and ammunition limbers and a staff car or two and, once, a wheezing tank with bowels shot through.

It was almost dusk when he reached the canal. There his progress was arrested by a voice which whipped out of the shadow.

"No *passez*, here," said the owner of the voice, coming up. "This bridge's blowed. Mine blowed her yesterday mornin' jus' after the boys jumped for Cambrai. Whole comp'ny of the Bull Moose got 'er in the face. —— of a mess, I'll say."

"Why," said David Layne, "that's the outfit to which I'm going."

"Well," said the bridge guard, "you'll find 'em—what's left of 'em—in the château over the ditch."

David Layne hitched his respirator higher on his chest, took a firm grip of his stick and prepared to move.

"I'd make it snappy if I was you," cautioned the bridge guard. "Heinie's been raisin' —— all day long here, an' —— knows when he'll start slingin' hate again."

David Layne laughed unconcernedly.

"I never worry, my man," he said. "Never. I know an antidote for worry."

The bridge guard watched David Layne make for the temporary crossing down stream.

"Holy Moses," he meditated, "but there goes a brave guy. Either that or he's jus' tryin' to be. Come to think of it, he *did* talk like he was half-jagged."

VII

THE château at Wamillies had been a château once. The greater part of it had bowed to belaboring from German guns, but, here and there, by a miracle of fate, walls jutted into the air and half the top floor remained in space, clinging tenaciously to existence. From this floor a staircase, swinging like a pendulum, led down to the ground level and from there continued to the cellars—spacious passages wherein the Bull Moose nursed wounds and bitterness alike.

Into this subterranean headquarters David Layne was ushered at the point of a bayonet in the hands of a grim-faced sentry who claimed to have found the "blighter" wandering about the courtyard.

"An' I blamed near nicked him, too," grinned the sentry, almost regretfully.

David Layne smiled calmly upon the cellar occupants.

"I'm your new chaplain, gentlemen," he said, totally indifferent to the appraising eyes bent upon him. "To whom do I report?"

"To me," rasped a voice which leaped at David Layne from out of the buried past.

David Layne swung about, saying to himself—

"That fellow Batch!"

One look confirmed his suspicion. Batch was there with the other Bull Moose officers. It was Batch who had spoken—the same stripling who had muddled things for him back at Ramshoot, whom he had disliked from the very beginning and whom he would continue to dislike. Yet neither by expression nor tone of voice did he reveal a trace of the contempt he felt. Apathetically he continued:

"So we meet again, major? Might I ask you to direct me to your commanding officer?"

"You might," said Batch. "I said, 'To me,' and I meant it. I'm commanding this unit—just now."

"Wheooo! Slam!"

The walls of the cellar reverberated to the explosion of a shell in the château grounds.

"There he goes—after us again," snarled Batch, getting up and stamping out.

David Layne looked puzzled. Some one proffered explanation.

"The Killer," explanation ran, "is wild-eyed. Hasn't gotten over yesterday morning. Lost half a company when a booby trap busted on the canal. New chaps. Conscript crowd. Poor birds. Never had a chance to show what they could do. That's why Batch is seeing red."

Some impulse prompted David Layne to inquire—

"What do you think of these new fellows?"

The reply came unhesitatingly:

"They're human—like all the rest of us. They'll scrap as well as the next troops once they've learned the ropes."

"Wheooo! Slam!"

Another shell pitched somewhere in the courtyard.

"Say," declared the explanatory one, "I'd like to be moving. Heinie's got a line on this dump. He'll knock us out of here the first thing we know."

Came a snarl. Batch had come back.

"Get Brigade," he spat at a man with receivers clapped to his ears. "Buzz them—stick at it till you raise them. —— it! Like as not the wooden-heads they've got running things down there now have gone to bed and left the war to run itself. Buzz them. Ask them, if you get them, when in —— we'll be relieved?"

From without came a great roar. A salvo of shells had banged in front of the château.

David Layne, still conscious of the tingle within him, watched Batch fidget, first on one foot, then on the other. Somehow or other the sight of Batch fidgeting brought elation to him. His nerves, he reflected, were steady enough. He had got over trembling knees and other things. Rather tolerantly he smiled.

Feet scraped at the foot of the stairs. A bulky person slid into the candlelight. He was visibly agitated.

"What's going on up there?" he shouted.

"Up where?" clicked Batch, stiffening.

"Up top this château?"

"Nothing that I know of," promptly returned Batch. "I put a kid heinie up there some time ago—prisoner—for gas guard; we were that short-handed. Why, what's wrong?"

"For ——'s sake get him out of there," shouted the bulky subaltern. "He's sig'-lin', I say, sig'lin'."

His warning trailed off into nothing. At full length on the stone floor he crashed,

blood oozing from a smashed shoulder where a bit from one of the courtyard crumps had plowed home.

"Sig'lin'—how?" demanded Batch metallically, bending over the casualty.

"Matches," the latter forced from his lips.

"Matches, eh?" deliberated Batch. "Drawing all this fire, eh?"

With a gritting of teeth he turned. The first person his eyes fell upon was David Layne.

"You'll do. Come 'long," he ordered. "Give me a hand."

Two at a time, they took the steps. With the upper half the stairs there was need, as already represented, for extra caution. They exercised it. Batch went first, David Layne keeping close on his heels. Beneath their weight the stairs creaked and swayed dangerously.

"I'll teach him to signal," Batch kept muttering. "I'll knock his —— brains out for him."

Then and there David Layne halted. This fellow Batch, he now recalled, had a passion for killing. He didn't want to see any killing. His soul revolted at the thought of such a thing.

"No butchery, Major," he called to Batch.

"Say," flared Batch, "I'm running this outfit, and I'll do what I please. You come along—and make it snappy."

At the top of the stairs they paused. Bluish-gray light filtered down through the roof upon them. Over in the corner there was a stir. There was a scratching sound. A match puffed into short-lived flame. Batch snorted and crossed the sagging floor in a single bound. Spellbound, David Layne saw him go; heard him say bitterly—

"You're through for the day, you sausage——"

Wop!

The bark of an automatic. A jet of yellow flame out of the blue-blackness. A puppy-like whimper. The funny sound a slithering body makes.

Batch came clumping back to the landing. David Layne barred his way.

"Of all the contemptible things—" he was saying when Batch shoved him against the wall, crying: "You asking for it, too? Lemme tell you, here and now, you good Samaritan, that I haven't any —— use for your breed. Get me. Not a bit. And if you feel so cursed sorry for that tricky Hun I just bumped off you can stay behind after we pull out tonight and bury his carcass."

David Layne felt his knees shake. He stepped aside when Batch told him to. But after the stripling had gone below he said—

"I won't be intimidated by him; I'm not afraid of him."

Mechanically he drew Trumpeter's parting gift—the silver flask—from his pocket.

"No, sir," he said loudly as the familiar tingle returned to him and trepidation fled, "he can't intimidate me. I'll have this thing out with him."

Below, David Layne accosted the stripling. The latter looked up from the phone into which he had been talking, heatedly.

"Well?" he asked.

At the far end of the passage, where the runners held out, a tenor voice was singing:

> "Mother— Mother!
> Hold me close to your breast, dear;
> Mother! Mother!"

A bit of a melody it was from a London show, yet David Layne knew it, and its appeal to the fighting man, stripped of home's pleasantries. Suddenly he had his plan of attack. He opened up with—

"If you ever had a mother, Batch, you never would have done that cowardly thing you did up-stairs."

"No?" said Batch, curling back his upper lip.

"No! Emphatically no!" argued David Layne. "Next to God, mother is——"

"Don't you preach God to me," Batch cried harshly.

His voice carried up and down the spacious cellars. Everywhere men pricked up their ears; hung on his words.

"Man," said David Layne, "have you so little respect for the Almighty that you should speak of Him so carelessly?"

"Listen," rasped Batch. "When you show God to me I'll believe in Him and not before. You haven't got the nerve to stand up and tell me there's God to be found in a dirty business that'll let a fellow lie wounded in the sun for three days—till he's been eaten up with flies and he's black from head to foot and he has to chew his rifle sling to keep alive. Is there any God in a business like that? If you can show me there is you're a —— sight better than most

of your kind. And believe me, I've seen a lot of you faith healers come and go since I've been out here."

VIII

WAR has its bright moments. Banice will class as such if ever the history of the Bull Moose be written. Banice, which came after Cambrai, was a little town of winding streets and red-and-white brick homes from which the Hun, before retiring, had ousted the French tenants to drive them like cattle ahead of him. Banice had been shelled but lightly.

In Banice the Bull Moose sat down to enjoy a ten-day rest. Every Banice home boasted a stove or two, real beds to be appreciated despite torn and bumpy mattresses, window boxes with fragrant flowers, chairs and tables and dishes like those back home, and in the back gardens a second crop of vegetables, artichokes, carrots and celery, to be had for the pulling.

Yes! Moments were bright in Banice where men did their own cooking and banished from dreams their machonachie nightmare; where men burned the midnight oil in modern lamps with no fear for the growling Gotha who hadn't been heard of for weeks; where men drilled and played and loafed on brown fields among brown-eyed daisies under a brown October sun.

David Layne liked Banice. In particular he liked the renamed street of Many Mansions. On this street was a billet, placarded "Mary Ann's" where he liked to consort with veteran campaigners and unseasoned draftees, alike, poking their ribs and slapping their backs and, after the prescribed fashion, asking "How's tricks?"

David Layne felt he had the proper system in dealing with these men. Good chaps they were who liked—he knew—to have him flop on his knees and shoot craps, or sit in at red dog, there to lose with equal abandon or to toss off the odd cognac with a sudden distortion of features, feigned of course, yet nevertheless laughable to the onlookers.

But David Layne did not loaf on his job. He never allowed himself to think that. Always, between acts, so to speak, he managed to work in a brief prayer—a prayer for speedy termination of the great struggle or for the salvation of men's souls or for something of that sort. And regularly he grouped the habitués of Mary Ann's about him and they sang resoundingly till the rafters rocked and plaster filtered down upon them, "Onward Christian Soldiers," or "Oh, That Will Be Glory for Me," or something of that sort.

One night the door opened suddenly. One of the old hymns died on the songsters' lips.

"Room, 'shun," somebody had presence of mind to yell. Everywhere men came to attention.

Into the room strode Batch, acting C. O. the unit. His face was working blackly. Said he, while all listened:

"I've been eavesdropping, I'll admit. But I have something to say that I want every one to hear. Captain Layne, I'm out to beat the Hun. If the cause can be aided any through your preaching—through these men listening to God; leave out my stand on the matter, please—I want them to hear the word of God. Get me? It's your duty to preach God, *Padre.* I don't say you have fallen down on your job. But lemme tell you that oil and water don't mix. And neither will God mix with poker and dice and booze. *Padre*—you'd better shake yourself. Get me?"

The door slammed, and he was gone. There was a buzz of tongues. David Layne felt that batteries of eyes had been turned searchingly upon him. Presently he went back to his own billet, where he found Trumpeter, over from Brigade, awaiting him. Trumpeter knocked the neck off the bottle he'd brought with him, then said:

"I think you ought to know, Layne, that this Batch wild man has filed an adverse report on you."

"Adverse?" said David Layne innocently. "Why?"

"There, there," said Trumpeter. "I know everything about the trouble, Layne. But don't worry. I can hold up that report if you like. Your colonel will be back from hospital soon. Then Batch will have to relinquish his command, and you'll be worried by him no longer. Why, I haven't much use for him either, *Padre.* We've had a run-in, too. A —— jealous little snip he is. Jealous of me. Jealous of you, *Padre;* jealous of the way you are cutting into the men's affections. Batch has had sway with the Bull Moose so long that he naturally resents the least indication of rivalry. Understand?"

Trumpeter arose and walked about the room whistling. Finally with some hesitation he said:

"Could you let me have two hundred, *Padre?* Awfully short I am just now. Can't dress like I do on nothing. Now—how do we stand?"

Reinforcements came in the next day—brown-faced, clear-eyed chaps who had gone through the mill and were to go farther. In front of his billet David Layne lounged, watching debussing operations. Whistles blew and rifle butts spanked on the pave, and a sergeant-major ran up and down like a cock pheasant yelling for more speed and still more speed. David Layne saw a familiar face.

"Hey, there! How's tricks, Drader?" he called affably.

The fellow called Drader turned at the greeting. For a moment he looked blank; then his eyes lit up with recognition.

"Hello, sir," he returned, and in compliment brought his hand *kerslap* to his rifle butt.

David Layne continued to look on. He wondered at the change that had come over the slovenly Drader—the Ramshoot trouble maker. He was still wondering when the sergeant-major threw a fit and whipped the brown ranks to the order. David Layne saw Batch approach the brown ranks and walk up and down their front, eying each man critically. He saw Batch stop in front of Drader; heard Batch say to Drader—

"We've met before?"

"Yes, sir!" Drader answered snappily.

"Soldiering now?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Out here, my man, we bury differences."

"Yes, sir!"

And that was all. A pang of disgust assailed David Layne. Why, he told himself, Drader had actually beamed on Batch. Surely not out of respect for him; surely not. Imagine him, David Layne, burying his differences with the snip.

"Ugh!" he grunted and moved away.

The rest tour sped to a close. The colonel of the Bull Moose returned from hospital. Batch went back to his company command. Out of the Indian-summery haze to the north came the dull thumping of artillery. After a quiet week in quiet streets men pricked up their ears and demanded interpretation of the rumbling.

"Stiff scrapping round Valenciennes," the colonel told them on a brown field one afternoon. "And sooner or later we'll be up that way, too," he added quietly. "To you new chaps I would say: You've got the stuff in you. Let it come out. Above all, stick to your officers. They'll take you where you're wanted to go."

"We're ready," somebody called. "Let's go."

The evening the Bull Moose embussed for the north, David Layne stood before his window. The glass rattled with the steadily increasing *brrrooommm* of the none-too-distant guns. The colonel came along. He said:

"Batch's company goes last. He just gave them a talk. You should have heard the cheering."

David Layne had heard the cheering.

"That kid," said the colonel, "is all for his men. He's a hard little ——; but—but war hasn't been any too kind to him."

The colonel spat forcibly.

"We might as well get down to brass tacks," he resumed. "How long are you two going to keep this thing up? You and Batch?"

David Layne started. "You've heard, too?" he asked.

"Heard?" barked the colonel. "Who the —— hasn't heard? You can't keep things of this sort from men's ears. Why, they're all talking—everywhere. Things have come to a pretty pass, I tell you, when men lay bets on their own officers' possibilities. Not an hour ago I heard one chap call to another, 'Ten to five on Batch.' "

"Meaning?" asked David Layne.

"Meaning, I suppose, that Batch will 'find God,' as the men say—don't look surprized, Layne—before you get some *bona-fide* backbone. *Bona fide*, I repeat."

David Layne felt his collar tightening. He tugged at it. With a little show of indignation, he asked—

"Who implies that I'm——"

"Afraid?" put in the colonel.

"Well—afraid if that's the word used."

"Why, I believe the suggestion came from Brigade in the first place—from a dirty little creature by the name of Trumpeter, forever blowing his own horn and telling all he knows. A regular little *Shylock!* Thanks to Batch——"

"I'll thank Batch to keep out of my affairs," said David Layne, warmly. "It's a habit he has."

The colonel glowered. "I tell you, Layne, that Batch with all his faults plays the game. He doesn't go behind a man's back. He's not that type. Never a word of this petty feud has he mentioned to me since I returned."

"I've been given to understand he reported adversely on me to Brigade."

"I don't think so. And I imagine you'll find I'm correct. Batch is not the kind to wash his battalion's dirty linen in public."

David Layne ruffled his hair. After painful silence he said—

"Well—I'm not afraid—say what they like."

"I hope not, Layne," enjoined the colonel. "You'll get plenty of opportunities to show you're not; that is, if——"

The C. O. pointed to the black badges of the chaplains' service.

"I won't hide behind them either," said David Layne.

"I hope not, Layne," declared the colonel, and jingled away down street to where the lorries were taking on north-bound freight.

"*Brrrooooom-broom!*" Up beyond the haze.

"*Tack-tack-tack!*" The window rattling.

David Layne suddenly shook. Little icy fingers—he knew the symptoms. So the colonel wondered, eh? He'd just have to make good, he told himself. Hang Batch! But with the C. O. it was a different matter. Make good? How? He knew how. He looked at his watch.

Five minutes left; five minutes in which to fill his flask. No hope at Mary Ann's. Weren't there some Sigs around the corner? He could buzz Brigade. Trumpeter would get the stuff for him. He wondered why Trumpeter hadn't been over earlier in the day. Trumpeter? Perhaps the colonel was all wrong about the little man. Colonels weren't infallible. If he could raise Trumpeter he could arrange to——

Sweating after his dash, he found himself at the Sigs hang-out.

"Get me Largo, please," he said.

Largo was code for Brigade. After ages, it seemed, he got connection. In a husky voice he asked for Major Trumpeter.

"Gone home—t' England—this mornin'," came the chirpy reply.

"Why? How?" mumbled David Layne.

" 'Sat you, 'Arry?" inquired the voice at the other end cautiously.

"Yes," mumbled David Layne, not knowing what he said.

"I'll tell you why an' how, 'Arry. The li'l bloodsucker bled people once t' often an' they tripped 'im up. Gen'ral's comin'. Ta-ta!"

Out on the street a bugle blew. There was a roar of many motors, the grind of wheels, and the convoy was under way. David Layne tore back to his billet, grabbed here and there for his equipment and tore outside again. On to one of the very last lorries he swung. A hand reached out and dragged him, panting, over the tailboard.

"Thanks," said David Layne when he'd recovered his breath.

"Don't mention it," came Batch's voice from the lorry platform.

IX

DAVID LAYNE squirmed his way forward to the cab. Next the lorry pilot he found a place from which he watched the night drag in. With darkness the going became a crawl. The way was rough and winding. The long line of buses, twisting like a snake's tail, headed ever northward to the shimmying glow on the horizon from which the days-old rumble had come.

David Layne watched the glow. In it he saw the old handwriting. He felt his position to be that of a poker player who, called, must expose his hand. In throwing Batch and him together, Fate, he felt, was playing against him, and calling him to lay his cards on the table. Cards? What did he have to show, he asked himself. Was fate to call his bluff?

Now and again the convoy halted. Once David Layne caught snatches of conversation from behind. Batch was saying:

"Liquor's all right if handled properly. So's rum. I believe in it. You've never heard of me cutting off an issue, have you?"

"Never," chorused several voices.

"But," Batch went on, "the man who takes it to stiffen his backbone is a lot better off without it. I've seen men take it that way. Half an hour after the kick-off they were crazy; nerves a hundred times worse than if they'd let it alone."

Something to think about? It gave David Layne food for reflection. Batch, he was sure of it, had said that for his sole benefit. Bah! Still it was something to

think about. Let it alone! Could he? Could he let it alone—now? So Batch had read his weakness.

Of a sudden he had an explanation of things. He now saw through the notice—OUT OF BOUNDS TO OFFICERS—that had been tacked over Mary Ann's. That had been Batch's work, as had been Trumpeter's dismissal from Brigade and a host of other things. Batch! A nasty word, that Batch. It sort of stuck in his crop.

In the darkness David Layne sat clenching his hands in accompaniment to the jangle of his soul. Perhaps, he figured, the stuff hadn't got a hold on him. Perhaps at the critical moment he could steady himself without it. Perhaps!

Just before dawn, journey ended. Pell-mell men tumbled from the lorries, glad of the opportunity to stretch cramped limbs.

"Fall in there, Don Company," David Layne heard Batch sing out.

Men jerked themselves together at the command; fell in; were soon slogging up the road. David Layne tagged in the rear. The line of lorries was swinging to the left. By and by they would about-turn and head for home. Smell of petrol! Roar of motors! Screech of brakes! Shouting from one cab to another! The lorries had gone.

Don Company plowed on.

"Gas, here," cautioned Batch as they came to low-lying land. "Watch out for it."

Instinctively David Layne felt for his respirator. Not there! Where was it, he asked himself? Had he left it behind in his Banice billet? He had. Fear struck home to him.

"My respirator's gone," he said aloud. "It's gone—missing."

"Wheooo! Pop!"

From out of the distance a gas shell gurgled and dropped dud-like in a neighboring field.

There was a sudden jerking amongst the fours.

"Keep on, there," rasped Batch.

Now a faint odor of garlic was borne to twitching noses.

"Where's my mask?" David Layne continued to cry.

"How the —— should I know?" spat Batch, coming 'longside him.

A flock of gurglers dropped "*pop-pop-pop-pop!*" in the same field.

"It'll drive me crazy," stammered David Layne.

"Stop singing those blues," said Batch. "Keep your head on your shoulders."

More gas shells! Fritz was laying down quite a concentration of the garlic stuff.

"Mustard," David Layne heard Batch comment.

Mustard? That stuff that blinded you and ate into your lungs and left running sores on perspiring spots!

"Oh, Lord," breathed David Layne, who felt himself dripping sweat all over. Cold sweat!

Dream-like he heard Batch fling out a string of commands; saw, all about him, men diving into their goggly masks.

David Layne dropped by the road, his head in his hands. Batch hustled up.

"O ——," David Layne was whimpering.

Batch spat—

"You got nerve to say that—you who haven't even the courage o' your convictions."

"*Wheooo!*"

This gurgler popped a lot nearer.

David Layne fairly shouted—

"I'll go mad, I will."

Batch whirled him about.

"Here, you four-flusher," said Batch, "take this." And he tore his own mask off his chest. "Take it, I say—and get it on you. Stop your bellyaching or you'll have this draft crowd wild. They're jumpy enough as it is. Stop it, or I'll knock your —— brains out for you."

David Layne had not learned his gas drill to no avail. He knew how to manipulate the thing. In a jiffy he hitched it to him. The canister gave off odd, gurgling noises—yet blessed sounds they were to the soul of a man who had but a four-flush to turn up on the table.

Through the sweating eye-pieces David Layne watched Batch walk amongst his men. Batch had jammed a handkerchief or something against his nose and mouth. Now and again he dropped his hand to speak. Once he shouted:

"Nothing to worry about. Wind's shifting. Soon be over. How're you making it, you new chaps?"

Somehow or other David Layne located Battalion headquarters. Beneath a bridge, on the road, he found it.

"For you," said the colonel, tossing a

letter his way. "Up with the mail before we left."

With the sight of his mother's handwriting David Layne got a grip on himself. A real comforter was his mother; good, kindly soul always bringing before his eyes word pictures of the hollyhocks along the back fence, taller than ever they were before; of Lady Jane—that was the cat—dragging in her newest children for the elder's approval; how humiliating! and of familiar folk, every-day passers-by, so considerate of a mother in hours of fret and worry.

A clipping dropped from the envelope. Mechanically David Layne picked it up. Across the bottom of it his mother had penciled—faithful old blue pencil!—"I wonder, sonny." The clipping read:

> He went, and he was gay to go;
> And I smiled on him as he went.
> My son—'twas well he couldn't know
> My darkest dread, nor what it meant—
>
> Just what it meant to smile
> And let my son go cheerily—
> My son—and wondering all the while
> What stranger would come back to me.

David Layne passed a hand across his eyes. Came a sound of coughing at the entrance to the bridge. Batch came in with a rag against his mouth.

"What the—?" cried the colonel, jumping up.

"Little whiff, that's all," explained Batch. —— fool I was; lost my respirator."

"You ought to be spanked," chided the colonel, meaning every word of it.

"Perhaps," said Batch, and turned away.

Suddenly David Layne felt uncommonly cheap. Cheap? Cheap in comparison with— He couldn't say it. Before him now he saw the hollyhock garden and his mother's cottage, and Lady Jane sunning on the kitchen stoop. Home? Yes! Sweet home! Home training, too? Yes! He had had it; the very best; the very finest. A mother's care—a mother's love—a mother's prayer——

"Ugh!" muttered David Layne.

What had home training done for him, he asked himself? No! That wasn't it. It was the other way round. He saw it now. It was: what had he done to it?

After a while:

"I've killed it," cried David Layne to himself. "I've butchered it. I've made a stranger of myself—a stranger."

"Here's your mask," said David Layne to Batch.

"Through with it?" asked Batch grimly.

"Yes!" said David Layne. "And thanks."

Batch jerked the handkerchief from his mouth.

"Don't thank me," he said. "Thank your— Oh, what's the use? Get out."

X

RÉMY!

The Bull Moose, jumping off that morning, had a picture of a solitary slagheap and a handful of miner's cottages basking in the sun six hundred yards away. That was Rémy, basking. By noon the Bull Moose had got to the railway line, one-half the distance, and no farther. Behind the railway line with its twisted ribbons of steel and broken ties and slim cover they struggled for second wind while all about them machine-gun fire from the coalpile and the cottages—fortified as they were found to be later—beat the devil's tattoo, and whizz-bangs, served with uncanny accuracy, sniped when and wherever khaki showed.

Rémy will go down in the history of the Bull Moose, if it ever be written, as one of the unexplainable things. Just as a barefoot boy hard pressed by some apple-orchard owner will sometimes turn in defiance, so the boche turned at Rémy and lashed out with both fists. Only, at Rémy the boche had the advantage of weeks, perhaps months, of preparation. Perhaps Rémy was a pivot on which turned a successful retreat. Perhaps the boche had intended to hold up there all along. Perhaps!

It doesn't matter at this late date. But on that November morning it did matter—especially to the Bull Moose who found their flanks in the air and their ranks thinned—frightfully thinned—from their three-hundred-yard scamper across flat, flat pasture land to the railway.

Beneath the road-bridge, as we have pictured him already, the colonel of the Bull Moose sat jiggling his feet. For a roof he had a thin sheet of corrugated iron. Behind the bridge field guns thumped and thumped so that the iron roof of the Bull Moose headquarters clanged with every thump.

Presently the colonel got up and crawled out into the sunshine, there to raise his head cautiously over the road level. Up ahead he saw a curtain of smoke come down in front of Rémy.

"Off again," he grunted, peering through his glasses. "Take a look at them, Layne."

David Layne emerged from beneath the corrugated. He took the C. O.'s binoculars and trained them up-country. He saw a thin line of fly-like figures walk away from the line of telegraph poles and disappear in the smoke. Indistinctly there came the rat-tat-tat-tat of machine guns.

"They're giving us——," fumed the colonel.

He stopped short as he saw the signaler near by buzzing futilely at his machine.

"Wire down," said the Sig exasperatedly.

The C. O. lashed himself into a fury of commands.

"Get every available lineman out. Get 'em out, I tell you! Get me communication."

David Layne watched men clump in and out of the headquarters. Again the colonel was bellowing. Shaking his fist at the Canadian back-country, he kept saying: "Come on, artillery; come on, artillery! Knock that —— coal pile down up there."

The signaler looked up.

"Got 'em," he said gleefully. "Here's——"

All ducked as a 5-9 slammed just in front of the road. Débris came flying back upon them.

"Close!" muttered David Layne.

"——!" said the Sig petulantly as he hammered his key. There was an awkward look on his fuzzy face. "Wire's down again——"

The C. O. swore. Tears in his eyes, he turned to David Layne. "If this isn't the worst muddle——"

Some one came bellying in from the sunshine.

"Don Company runner," gasped the some one.

"Who—which?" demanded the C. O.

"Don Comp'ny," reiterated the runner. "Major Batch——"

"Yes! Go on," entreated the C. O.

"D-d-dyin', sir—he's dyin'."

"No!" thundered the colonel.

"Yes, sir! Up by—by the track. Bullet through his middle."

The runner brushed his sleeve across his eyes.

The colonel swore some more; yelled for his adjutant, who couldn't very well come, he having bustled off to a line of trees on the right where flank troops were playing pingpong or something, according to the C. O.'s accusations.

"Major Batch wants you up there," the runner was gulping.

"Up ahead?" asked the C. O.

"Up ahead," returned the runner. "He wants to talk to you 'fore he goes West." Again he dashed a dirty sleeve to his eyes.

David Layne moved forward and rested his hand on the fellow's shoulder.

"Why—why," he said, surprized-like, "it's you—Drader!"

"Yes, sir!" snapped Drader, and turned appealingly to the C. O. "Ready, sir? I'll take you up."

The C. O. slipped his helmet strap to the point of his chin; jerked out his Smith & Wesson, which he eyed momentarily and then jammed back in its holster.

"All set," he barked. "Jones—"the adjutant was Jones—"will be back any minute; he can run this blasted culvert."

"Just a second!" a wavering voice put in. "I think I'll go along."

"Suit yourself," said the colonel as David Layne tightened his respirator string.

From behind a box the C. O. got the rum-jug. From it he filled his water bottle. Then he called—

"Runner!"

Drader smacked his parched lips. The C. O. took a long pull, then turned to David Layne, inquiring—

"Snort?"

David Layne felt himself tremble.

"N-no, thanks, sir!" he managed to get out of him.

Up ahead smoke lay over everything. Straight for that smoke Drader led them. He did not veer a foot from the straight line, even when heinie crumps slammed in front of them. Down—up—and away they went, Drader's legs twinkling, the colonel stumbling and swearing, David Layne, white-lipped and shaky, pleading with himself and following in a mechanical way.

Something told them that the second jump had broken down as had the first. German machine guns fired but spasmodically from the slag-heap and cottages beyond the smoke pall. But if any doubt was entertained as to the punch in that Rémy redoubt it was dispelled with the

first look along the railway line. Dead and wounded sprawled between the rails and among the ties and out in front where the pasture land sloped slightly upward to the village.

They found Batch with his back against a telegraph pole.

"Propped him there so he could give orders," explained a non-com. "He insisted on it; won't let us carry him out."

David Layne, befuddled as he was, noted the dull light in the stripling's eye; the frothy exudation on his lips; the reddish-black splotch beneath his loosened Sam Browne.

"Anything I can do for you?" he asked timidly.

Batch's eyes flicked a little interest. His neck stiffened with effort.

" 'S'at, you, sir?" he asked feebly.

The colonel dropped beside him:

"Yes, Batch! You sent for me?"

"Yes, sir!" The words dragged laboriously from the stripling's lips. "I can—I guess it's you will have to—take that stinking place yet. G-get some one to—to lead a platoon up that creek—yonder—and we can outflank the——. She's full o'—full o' water—b-but you can make it. You'll catch 'em—catch 'em by s'prize."

The C. O. was a man of action.

"Assemble that platoon," he shouted. "And send some officer here."

"None left in this comp'ny," declared Drader the runner. "All down."

The colonel swore bitterly.

"I'll take them then," he flared. "I guess I can still handle a gat."

Rat-a-tat-tat! Rat-a-tat-tat! Machine guns still alert.

From little shelters, here and there along the track, men assembled reluctantly at the call. The C. O. stamped around like an infuriated bull.

"Get down, sir; get down," came whispered entreaty from Batch. "He'll snipe you off; he'll——"

David Layne bent over the stripling. "Is there nothing—nothing at all I can do for you, Batch?"

A little gleam of recognition came into the casualty's eyes.

"No!" he muttered. "I ain't afraid to die."

Notwithstanding, David Layne raised his eyes heavenward.

"O God, have mercy—" he was saying.

"Don't," cried Batch, with a flash of the old fire. "I don't want it. I'm not used to praying."

"But your mother——"

"My mother?" clicked Batch. "She never taught me to pray. I—I—they found *me*—found me on a doorstep. I was—that kind, Layne. I guess I hadn't much chance—from the first. Had I?"

The attacking platoon stood ready.

"All set, men?" said the C. O.

Slam!

Dead-on was the shell. That was why there had been no whistle. David Layne picked himself up. The colonel, he instantly saw, was down with a pulpy leg. Plenty of others moaned too. Dazed fellows were scattered all over the line.

"What's wrong? What's wrong?"

Batch tried to raise his voice. Trembling, David Layne recited the damage wrought by the sniping gun. Batch seemed to have lost interest, for he kept chanting:

"Make it snappy. Make it snappy."

David Layne peered into the smoke. He saw the creek; a shallow-banked thing into which heinie shells would soon dig; a death-trap if ever heinie got wise. Batch asked thickly—

"Wha's wrong?"

"No officer," said David Layne uncomfortably.

Batch sat silent. Drader, the runner, bent over him.

"There's the *padre*, here," said Drader. "What about him?" And he looked at David Layne imploringly.

"Humph," said Batch.

Men gathered around.

David Layne was looking into space. He knew what these men expected of him but he couldn't say a word. For the life of him he couldn't say a word. Were those his knees trembling; his hands shaking? Why did he have to go along that creek? Why should he go? His badges didn't specify messy jobs of this kind. No! They did not. Why should he go?

Suddenly Drader held up his hand for attention. Over Batch's pale face had come the queerest of looks. His lips were moving. A dozen heads dropped low to catch the dribble from his lips. The dribble ran:

"O you God, if you're up there, and you'll have to show me, please put some guts in this preacher o' yours and let us save the

day. God—d'you hear me? I know I shouldn't ask, but——"

Batch, the Killer, slipped away from his support and slithered in the dirt.

THE smoke was lifting as David Layne assembled his crowd. Some of the men—newcomers from Ramshoot—held back as he assumed charge.

"Get up there," spat Drader. "Get up, there. He's goin' to take us where we're s'posed to go."

"If you will follow me," added David Layne with a little catch in his throat.

Wheooo!

A shell whipped up from behind the slag-heap. Was it headed for the creek? Perhaps!

Some one counseled:

"Better take off those badges, *Padre*. You can't tell what heinie might do to you if you was took pris'ner."

David Layne looked down at his badges. They seemed unusually bright to him.

"They'll do," he said quietly. "Let's go."

It was Drader, the old trouble-maker, who started it.

"Hip—Hip—" he started it.

And with three-and-a-tiger, the Bull Moose went to Rémy.

XI

THE officers of the First Reserve, Ramshoot, were at dinner.

Fatty, the C. O., swung in his chair, chortling:

"Batch's got another bar to his cross. That's three now. He nearly got the V. C. Posthumously, I mean—but he pulled through and wouldn't hear of it. Catch him dying from a mere stomach wound? Catch him—after surviving that other time—those three days of lying out suffering from wounds and flies and starvation. You remember that time?"

The mess buzzed.

Fatty looked down at his letter again. Suddenly he whistled oddly.

"What's all this—this about Layne? Good Lord! Can you beat it? Listen!"

EMERALDS OF CORTEZ

by Eugene Cunningham

NO ONE stone is really entitled to the name emerald. Originally it applied to chrysocolla, now considered only semi-precious, and to green tourmaline. Even today we have "Oriental" emeralds—corundum, and "Uralian" emeralds—green garnets or olivine. The true emerald of modern times is the "grass-green beryl," gaining its peculiar tint from a trace of chromic oxid.

In ancient times the true emerald—valued as an aid to failing vision, but paradoxically considered fatal to the eyes of serpents—came perhaps from the Cleopatra Mines of Upper Egypt. But from the time of the Spaniard in the New World, South America has furnished the bulk of the finest stones. The Muysca Indians of Colombia prized the emerald—and any other green stone—as the most precious of gems. The *conquistadores* indorsed this belief and from Peru sent back to Spain many magnificent emeralds, though it is probable that none of these were mined in Peru. It is likely that the mines of today, at Muzo, northwest of Bogotá, produced all of the traditional "emeralds of the Incas."

Of all Peruvian emeralds, five belonging to Hernan Cortez were most noted. One was carved as a bell, with a fine pearl for clapper and bore on the rim in Spanish: "*Blessed is he who created thee!*" A second was cut like a rose; a third like a hunting horn; a fourth fashioned like a fish with eyes of gold. The fifth and most valuable was hollowed into a cup and had a foot and rim of gold.

Tradition has it that the Spanish queen greatly desired these gems, but Cortez bestowed them upon his bride, the niece of the Duke de Bejar, and so gave mortal offense to the queen. But one must believe that Hernan was no reckless giver. It is recorded that when he sailed in 1529 to assist Charles V. in the siege of Algiers, the emeralds were lost when Cortez was shipwrecked.

MOUNTAINS of MYSTERY

A Four-Part Story—Part II

by Arthur O. Friel

Author of "The King of No Man's Land," "Tiger River," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.

ALTHOUGH they had fought side by side in France, found wealth along the upper reaches of the Amazon and traveled in many odd corners of the world, their wanderlust would not let them rest.

So they started out again—Captain Roderick McKay, Lieutenant Meredith Knowlton and Sergeant Tim Ryan—to explore the Venezuelan upcountry in search of the fabled white Indians.

At Ciudad Bolívar they hired as a guide Portonio Mariano, a native well acquainted with the Rio Orinoco. And at San Fernando, up the Rio Ventuari, the plotting governor of the district supplied them with two more men to act as pilot and handy man.

While they slept on a playa in midstream, one night, the two San Fernando men stole the motor launch and left the party stranded. They awoke with a start when Portonio shot a jaguar, which had swum the river to attack them. A little later in the day they were rescued by Lucio León, called "Loco" León by the people of Ciudad Bolívar, because of the weird, strange tales he told of the unknown hinterland.

He was a well-to-do trader in balata rubber, and, owing to his fair treatment of the natives, the Maquiritare people were devoted to him. The governor of San Fernando, however, hated him and had sent out some men to "remove" him. They had failed.

The friendship that sprang up between the Latin and the three Northerners was spontaneous. Hearing of their plans Loco León offered to accompany them in search of the white Indians, although he refused to say whether he knew of the existence of these people.

That night the party stopped off at León's *sitio* and a small band of Indians from the Caño Tamara came to seek information about the three newcomers.

While León talked to the spokesman Tim Ryan went out to look over the other Indians. Just as he was about to move on he asked abruptly:

"How many days to the place of the *blancos puros*?"

"Twenty days," came the unguarded answer.

After dark, when all was quiet, the natives vanished to carry the news of the strangers' coming to the Talking Mountain.

Next day the four white men started upstream in dugout canoes and reached the Equencua Falls, where they disembarked and started on the long portage to the head of the rapids.

CHAPTER VII

THE BLACKENED MEN

FOR two days the oddly assorted expedition toiled upward through a welter of rocks, reefs, and rapids, following tortuous channels wherein snarling white waters fought to hurl it back on jagged fangs of stone. On every hand stood islands, varying in size from small bare domes to sizable expanses heavily jungled; and from all sides, as the canoes stubbornly nosed their way onward, new brawling currents lunged in to attack them.

As León had said, the river now was a maze; a wide, bewildering *raudal* wherein the stream divided into a crazy network of tumbling creeks and brooks and little falls, among which no stranger could have picked his course.

Progress was attained only by poling in the brief smooth stretches and by hauling and heaving in others. For much of the time the Indians were overboard, some

"*Mountains of Mystery*," *copyright, 1925, by Arthur O. Friel.*

bracing themselves on spurs of stone ahead and tugging at the ropes, while the others, waist-deep astern, shoved the ponderous craft upward and forward to clear the serrated edges of submerged dikes. Meanwhile the señores picked their way as best they could along the rubble at the sides, reentering the canoes wherever it was practicable to ride a few rods before again disembarking.

As they had done below Equencua, they journeyed with two canoes, the third one available at the upper port having been left at its mooring. Those with which they now traveled would in turn end their voyage below the next cataract, beyond which still others would be used. All these boats, and others besides, were the property of León, whose balata business and personal activities along the river necessitated the maintenance of a number of floating craft at different strategic points.

About mid-afternoon on the second day a rumble from upstream became gradually louder as the boats advanced. The second fall was at hand. Unlike Equencua, however, it was not visible to river travelers; for between the channel and the precipice intervened a tall-timbered point, and the raging white water rushing around that point would have hurled to destruction any canoe approaching it. This, León said, was the cataract of Oso—the Bear.

The two dugouts crawled along near the right shore, turned in at a creek-mouth where the water lay smooth and still, and, a few rods inland, grounded on mud. Beyond stretched the rocky bed of the creek, now dried up; a steep-banked ravine nearly overarched by the far reaching branches of the bordering timber.

"Now we walk again," announced their guide, leading the way to a faint footpath angling up the left bank.

After a few minutes of climbing a stiff grade amid cool shadows, the column emerged into blinding sunlight and an expanse of rolling savanna thinly dotted with stunted trees. So unexpected was the widening of the view that the Americans, who for weeks had traveled between the confining walls of river verdure, exclaimed with pleasure. And when, reaching the crest of a hillock, they found spread before them a broad panorama, they halted to gaze.

Far in the distance towered stark mountains of sheer rock, veiled by a thin blue heat-haze, yet unable to conceal their harsh seams and their saw-toothed outline. Their bases were invisible, being masked by an intervening expanse of hills whereon grew a solid sea of trees. Near at hand lay the open savanna, burnt yellow by the pitiless heat of the dry time.

The river had vanished, flowing somewhere below the eye level in its perpetual covert of shore timber, and nowhere in all the far-flung countryside showed the tiniest glint of water. Nor in the snow-white clouds drifting slowly across the intensely blue sky was any hint of rain.

Harsh and hot lay the land—yet, with its bold colorings and its masses of forest and mountain, savagely beautiful under the sun. And out from the heights blew a lusty breeze, dry, invigorating, which the men on the hilltop inhaled in great breaths while they looked abroad.

For a time they stood wordless, contemplating the wide land wherein moved no other white men. Then Knowlton unslung his rucksack, drew out a camera, adjusted a ray screen to cut the distant haze, and, with a tiny click, recorded the scene. When he had rolled the film they moved on.

As they moved, so moved the clouds, floating upon their way as the men crept along theirs. And when, presently, those men entered another belt of forest and lost sight of the wide reaches, one of the ever-changing clouds lengthened itself into a thumb and smeared out the brilliant sun.

At once the light was gone from the face of the savanna; the jungled reaches became dull green lagoons, harboring nameless creatures of the shadows; the far mountains turned into the dark, ugly teeth of a trap lying open, awaiting its prey.

Guayana, the siren, had smiled bewitchingly at the adventurers while they paused to look upon her. Now that their eyes were blinded once more, the smile had become a menacing grin.

Down along a winding path filed the voyagers, to emerge ere long in a partial clearing where trees stood untouched by steel or fire, but where all bush had been cut away. There stood a palm hut closed on three sides, the fourth open toward the river, only a stone's throw beyond. There, too, several dugouts floated at the water's edge. The muffled thunder of the cataract now sounded below, instead of above, and the river had become once more a river instead of a maze;

a rock-studded, growling stream, but still a united body, not a brawling chaos.

As the newcomers stepped to the edge to survey it, the cloud-thumb overhead swung away from the sun, and the Ventuari became again a playground for diamonds of light—dazzling, dancing, luring the men again to her treacherous bosom, as the land had just beckoned them onward with its seductive smile.

"I like this here river, even if it does fight ye all the time—mebbe that's why I do like it," declared Tim. "D'ye notice, fellers, the skeeters ain't nowheres near so thick up here? And— Say, lookit them big cherries over in that canoe! Looks like a whole pail of 'em. Oh, boy! If we only had some Manhattan cocktails to go with 'em, now, we'd be set up right."

He strode over to the dugout, which, unlike the others, lay untied, partly hidden by projecting tree-roots. From its curved bottom he lifted a big gourd full of luscious looking blood-red fruits.

"Cherries?" puzzled McKay. "Never heard of cherries in Venezuela. León! What are these? And how did they get here?"

Portonio, lounging near, spoke before the blond Spaniard; but his word conveyed no meaning to his employers.

"*Sehi*," he said.

León, approaching, gave one glance at the gourd, another at the canoe, a third at the trees, as if seeking some one there.

"*Sehi*," he echoed. "Fruits of the *assehi* palm. But— This *curial* is not mine. Frasco! Men are here who left their *curial* and *sehi*. Go and find them."

Frasco and his companions came first and looked at the canoe, at the fruits, and, narrowly, at the gourd. This large calabash bore near its rim a wavy line of faded red paint, with a number of blackish dots.

"Maquirital," asserted Frasco. "Caño Cerbatana."

Without taking their weapons, he and his mates scattered into the grove, moving like men sure of what they would find.

"Maquiritares from Caño Cerbatana—the Creek of Blowguns," repeated León. "That is only three days above here. Two or three men have cruised down on a hunt, perhaps, and, seeing several white men coming with guns, they slipped into the woods yonder. They are not fond of showing themselves."

A peculiar smile flitted over his face, and his gaze lingered again on the blood-red palm-fruits, as if they had some connection with the shyness of the Cerbatana men.

"While we wait for them to come back," he went on, in an odd tone, "let me show you something new in the way of a drink. It is not the cocktail for which you wished, Señor Tim, but it will quench thirst much better."

WITH that he stepped into his house, took from some spot overhead a metal basin, came out, dipped up some water, and, taking from Tim the gourd, returned to the interior and fell to work. Rapidly he pulped the fruits in the water, crushing them between his palms with a rolling motion, then squeezing the bruised mass into the basin.

When he desisted his hands were dyed red, and so was the water into which he had pressed the pulps. Then, while Portonio held the calabash, he strained the sinister-looking liquid through his crossed fingers, holding back a useless residue of stones and skins. Casting these back into the pan, he took the gourd and its crimson drink.

"To you, señores—*Salud!*" He bowed, and took a swallow from the primitive bowl. Then he passed it to his fellow blond, Knowlton. "Drink of the *sehi*, which is good for many things: To quench thirst, to purge the body, to grow hair, to oil guns, to burn in lamps and, sometimes, to drive men mad."

"What?" ejaculated Knowlton, abruptly lowering the gourd after nearly tasting from it. "To drive men mad?"

"Sometimes. But this will not do so. Neither will it burn—as it is. It can be made to do all those things when rightly prepared. Now it is only a harmless drink. Try it."

Knowlton eyed the stuff dubiously. Then, recalling that the host himself had drunk from it, he raised it again and took a taste; considered it a few seconds, and imbibed more heartily.

"Not so bad," he approved. "Rather a queer taste, but— Try it, Rod?"

McKay, expressionless, downed a capacious mouthful and passed it on.

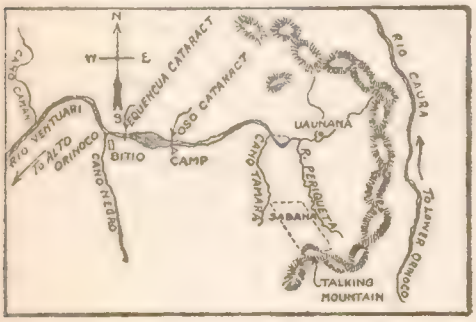
Tim scowled at it; then muttered, "Wal, can't be no worse than some o' the hootch I've lapped up since prohibition hit the States," and gingerly sampled it. Portonio

calmly drained the remainder and licked his lips.

"Guess you were joking, weren't you, about the madness in that stuff?" asked Knowlton. "Or can it be fermented into a murderous form of booze? I've heard of Indians making some horrible brands of hootch that drove 'em crazy."

"No. It is neither a joke nor a liquor, señor. The only intoxicating drink used by these people—and then only when they have one of those mysterious dances of theirs—is the *yaraqué*, made from fermented cassava and powdered *yaraquero* leaves; and it is not violent. But this *sehi*——"

He broke off, his head turning toward the woods, whence now sounded an almost inaudible tread of bare feet. His men were returning, and with them came strangers.



León glanced keenly at the latter, then nodded as if seeing something he had expected.

"These men of the Creek of Blowguns have drunk the *sehi* once too often," he concluded. "Look well at them."

Approaching shyly, yet without the tense wariness of the wild rovers from the Caño Tamara who had visited the Spaniard's headquarters, came three unclothed Indians, each carrying a different weapon; bow and arrows, long lance, and ten-foot blowgun.

"Huh! Niggers!" remarked Tim.

León made no reply. The eleven aborigines came on and halted, the light-skinned ones grinning as if their companions were comical, the three dusky ones smiling slightly at León, whom they evidently knew. The Northerners scanned them sharply, seeking signs of the lunacy indicated by León's statements. They detected none.

The brown eyes under the banged black hair were intelligent, mild, devoid of any hint of insanity. Their faces were gentle and expressive, their features remarkably good; their physiques, too, were slender and graceful, and their stature above that of León's retainers. In fact, they would have been considerably more handsome than the others but for one all-pervading disfigurement—their livid skins.

Those skins were repulsively unnatural. At first sight they seemed to be, as Tim had said, those of negroes. Now, however, it was plain that they were not. The men were blackened, rather than truly black; their dermal pigmentation was not a solidly even duskiness bestowed by heredity, but a fine-grained, faded discoloration which looked filthy—as if they had been smeared from head to foot with a black paint which had been weakened, but not removed, by bathing. Moreover, their features were not in the least negroid. They were not only truly Indian, but Maquiritare Indian, in all save their color.

These points the men from the North observed, and on their brows gathered thoughtful frowns. They noted, too, the jeering grins of the other Maquiritares, whose skins were so clean and clear. And they perceived that the blackened ones were well aware that they were regarded with derision by their own countrymen, and that they showed no resentment; rather, they stood with the patient air characteristic of unfortunates long accustomed to ridicule.

"What ails these fellows?" demanded McKay.

INSTEAD of replying, the Ventuari man spoke in Spanish to the dusky ones.

"Why are you so black?"

A long pause. Then, with the weary intonation of a man explaining something well known, the tallest answered:

"*Yucut' 'sehi.*"

"Ah. And why did you drink the sehi?"

No answer. The three livid faces lost their good humor. The other Maquiritares laughed aloud.

"You can not make yourselves light once more?"

A short headshake. The three began moving toward their canoe.

"Do not go," León added quickly. "I ask no questions. Stay and eat more good rice and fish."

They hesitated, then turned back, mollified.

"*Bueno.* We stay," acquiesced the spokesman. And in token of their trust of León they leaned their weapons against a tree and squatted at its base, unwinkingly regarding the newcomers in their land, who still watched them.

"Now that you have heard from their own lips, señores, that it was the *sehi* which made them what they are," the Spaniard said, "I will explain. Among these people it is possible to blacken a man's skin, as these are blackened, by giving them *sehi* to which other things have been secretly added.

"The *yucuta sehi* is a dainty dish to the Indian—*yucuta* being manioc in a gourd with water or other liquid, and *yucuta sehi* being the same manioc in the *sehi* drink. Now observe that these men once were handsome—and still would be, if their skins were not spoiled. Any Indian girl would look at them with admiration. So their own women have made them hideous for life by giving them the blood-changing, skin-changing stuff in a gourd of those palm-fruits. No other girl will want them now.

"Indeed, all Maquiritares laugh at such men; they are jokes, because they have been trapped and tricked by women. They do not even live with other Maquiritares, but in a small *paragua*—a tribe-house—of their own, on the Caño Cerbatana, which is a poor creek and full of mosquitoes. Nobody lives there except these, and the women who made them what they are, and their children."

There was silence for a full minute. The Americans searched his face, finding there no levity; studied the branded trio again; and stared at one another.

"Gee cripes!" blurted Tim. "And they're like that for life? And—did ye say crazy, too?"

"No. These are not crazy. But suppose a man, a white man, say, very handsome and proud of himself, should be turned black like these, made unable ever again to mingle with white people—what would be the effect on his mind?"

"Do you mean that such a thing has happened here?" asked McKay.

León did not answer at once. Thoughtfully he regarded his questioner, as if debating something within his mind. When he did reply, it was with a true Spanish evasion.

"*Quién sabe?* Who knows what may have come about in this land of strange things? I was only asking you what such a trick would do to such a man."

"He'd go nutty," conceded Tim. "He'd have to live with niggers, and it'd break him. Lots o' fellers have killed themselves for less'n that. Urrgh! Nice pleasant ol' river ye've got here, with its nigger poison and— Say, I s'pose that blowgun there shoots them same poison darts they use on the Amazon, don't it? *Wurali* poison, that kills ye if it jest scratches yer hand?"

"The same, señor, although we call it curare here."

"I knowed it!" The red man's groan was dismal. "That stuff makes me stummick turn over. I thought I was through with it for life—and here I am again, amongst poison cherries and poison darts and poison everything. The minute I git into South Ameriky I find somethin' like that. Do all the Injuns round here use that shootin' poison?"

León nodded. Tim turned away. Reckless in the face of most forms of danger, he yet possessed an unconquerable aversion to anything poisonous or insidious, and now he wanted no further revelations for the time. The Spaniard, too, walked houseward, giving his men orders for various things to be done before sundown, now close at hand.

McKay and Knowlton remained where they were, Portonio silently loitering near. And the black men squatted motionless, wordless, steadfastly regarding the strange beings from another world.

"Well, if you see it it's so," mused Knowlton. "We see these three black crows sitting all in a row, and they're so. But I wonder why our friend yonder dodged your question about crazy black-white men?"

"I wonder," pondered McKay.

And, with little frowns of thought and formless surmise, they stood gazing up the mysterious river.

CHAPTER VIII

TOLL

THE three black men of the Creek of Blowguns remained that night at the Oso camp. The next morning, when the expedition resumed its ascent of the river, they accompanied it in their own canoe. And for the ensuing three days—until the mouth of the Caño Cerbatana was reached

—they traveled always a little behind; silent, sombre, trailing the invaders of their country like dusky ghosts of the Carib warriors who, more than a century agone, had massacred soldier and priest and closed the land of Guayana to intruders.

In all the journey they seldom spoke and never smiled. The patient good nature which had been theirs when they first emerged from the woods seemed to have vanished over night. Not that they had turned sour or become menacing; their attitudes were as mild and self-effacing as before; but they were grave, almost grim, in their inscrutable quiet and their ceaseless surveillance.

On the first evening they squatted until supper time, and later, watching every movement of the Northerners, listening to the sounds of their voices, reading their faces as best they might. Then they withdrew to a leaf-roofed lean-to under which their lighter confrères slept; and if they asked their countrymen questions about the newcomers, the latter never knew it.

From that time onward they maintained the same unobtrusive but endless watch over the two canoes ahead. At night they camped at the same spots as the whites, though always at a respectable distance.

At meal times they accepted, as a matter of course, a share of the manioc and dried fish forming the staple diet of León's men; but they always ate a little apart from the rest, taking their common portion in their large gourd and then squatting a rod away to devour it. And when the swift darkness deepened they vanished into it, to be seen no more until morning.

To the few questions of Loco León they answered briefly. They had seen no other men along the river; the hunting was fair; their people were well. That was all they had to say—and that only to León. To the outlanders, who addressed a few tentative remarks to them on the first day, they made no response whatever. Thereafter the visitors left them to themselves.

By contrast with this sable, solemn trio, the Maquiritares who propelled the two leading boats seemed all the more fair of skin and light of heart. They now had become accustomed to the presence of the new white men; and, in battling with the river, they were in their element—fighting against the crafty old torrent which they had known since childhood, defeating its treachery by greater cunning of their own.

The combat seemed to exhilarate them, bringing to the surface the innate joy of conflict which, in quieter moments, was hidden beneath their impassive exteriors. The more wicked the *raudal* confronting them, the more spirited their attack; and when it was conquered, they turned shining eyes on the Northerners and laughed like boys.

Then, with smooth water ahead, they cooled into their former reserve, exhibiting no more enthusiasm until they met the next barrier. If the blackened men following felt the same joyous excitement in pitting their strength and stratagems against the powerful currents they did not show it.

The travel now was deceptively dangerous; deceptive, because the river was more silent than below Oso, more smooth to the eye, yet more fierce. Between the cataracts the water had been divided among many channels, and thus, despite its raging tumult, had dissipated its energy.

Here the river hurled its whole weight over the rock dikes, below which the boulders threw up white waves leaping like ravening wolves; and it was up through these lashing white demons, up over the smooth but powerful crests of the drops, in the face of the full intensity of the current, that the ponderous dugouts must be forced. Only the canny skill of the Maquiritares and their unerring selection of the vulnerable spots made possible the passage of these death-traps.

The Indians worked now without shirts, for the mosquitoes had virtually vanished from the river in this higher altitude, and at these upper *raudales* the men wanted not the slightest impediment to free action. Even Portonio, though clinging tenaciously to the wearing of trousers, discarded his shirt at the rough spots, the better to bend his brawny back to the heaving upward of the canoes; for at those places he worked beside the Indians.

To the Americans, working their way with machets along the shore while the boats were shoved through, but keeping a sharp watch of the activities in the water, it was noticeable that the color of the aborigines virtually matched that of the Venezuelan riverman—who, though swarthy, was indubitably white.

"I wonder," Knowlton suggested once, when León was not close at hand, "if those

fellows themselves aren't the legendary 'white race' up here. They're as white as Portonio—almost. Suppose León's giving us a fine wildgoose chase?"

McKay shook his head.

"Those black fellows down yonder are niggers—almost," he countered. "But they're not niggers. No more are these chaps white men."

"And them Tamara guys said there was real white folks twenty days up," reminded Tim.

The blond Northerner said no more.

AS THEY mounted, the heavy forest on the banks became interspersed with open spaces where stood only stunted, scattered palms along shore, with no trees of any kind beyond them. Scaling the steep slopes to look around, they saw, across this savanna region, mountain masses.

Everywhere rose those barriers, surrounding the open lands like grim guardians watching over solitudes wherein, by some mysterious decree, no man might make his home. And when, presently, a high bare hill was met and climbed for a broader view, the sullen opposition of Guayana to white invasion and settlement became all the more evident.

To east and north and south the jungled heights stood close-packed, invulnerable, barring all ingress save by such creatures, animal or human, as were born to their secret passes. Only at the west was visible a gap on the sky-line; and it was through that gap that the river-following adventurers had come and must return—if ever they did return from the sombre labyrinth waiting beyond.

"There ends the *sabana*," said León, pointing toward the dense array of green giants at the east. "After we reach that point you will see nothing but the *selvas*—the forests—and the people of the shadows."

The people of the shadows! A peculiarly apt expression, this, which lingered long in the memories of his auditors; a descriptive phrase meant, perhaps, only to indicate that the inhabitants of those *selvas* lived in leafy shade, yet suggestive of some interpretation more ominous; indeed, all the more sinister because groping fancy was free to attach to it whatever unpleasant meaning arose to mind. Too, the silent dogging of those dusky Cerbatana men gave a foreboding tinge to the cryptic words. Were there, perhaps, more such black shadows as they in the gloomy depths of the unexplored forests ahead?

When, on the third day, those funereal trailers drew aside into the mouth of a *caño* at the left and León turned to wave a casual farewell, Tim quickly asked—

"Is this the limit for them guys?"

And when León simply replied: "That is the Caño Cerbatana," his canoe mate breathed deep, as if a load had been lifted.

"Faith, now I can set up straight," he said; and he did so. In answer to the Spaniard's quizzical glance, he went on: "I dunno why, but I've been feelin' more comfortable when somethin' solid was against me back, these last three days. Some way I never feel right when a guy with one o' them blowguns is behind me. Oh, yeah, I know these ginks are friendly and all that, but jest the same— I dont like them poisoned needles for a cent, Loco. When one of 'em's behind me I git kind o' clammy betwixt the shoulders."

León nodded without comment, but apparently with perfect understanding. Quite likely he, too, had experienced that chill along his spine more than once in his career.

In the other dugout Knowlton was admitting a somewhat similar feeling of relief, though his reason was different.

"*Adios*, you tar babies," he remarked, without raising his voice. "And I don't care if you never come back. Rod, I feel as if we'd ditched a jinx. Those three chromos of tough luck have been on our trail so long they were beginning to drag on my nerves."

The blackened trio, themselves, gave no word or sign of farewell. For a few minutes they held their boat at the mouth of the forested creek, watching the white men go their way. When next those whites glanced back they had vanished.

For the rest of that day, and for half the next, the party toiled onward in open country. Then, at a sharp angle of the stream, tall forest shot up on either side. The river still glared with the intense light of the midday sun, but to right and left hovered the dimness of the verdant woods. The wide vistas were gone, and before the roving eye lay only a short reach of the everturning, ever-narrowing Ventuari, with its next *raudal* snarlingly awaiting the

approach of the invaders. And it was here, on the threshold of the land of perpetual shadows, that a son of that land passed into the shadows for all time.

So short was the rapid and so slight the drop of the miniature waterfall that the Indians—who gave to such spots the contemptuous name of *"raudalitos"*—asserted their ability to slide canoes and passengers through, instead of landing the latter to walk along shore.

At a number of similar small barriers they had already done this, and the present obstruction was no worse than those previously passed. Therefore the white men retained their seats while the Maquiritares, standing on underwater segments of rock, essayed the feat. The first dugout, carrying León and Tim, made good the passage. The second did not.

Just as it tottered over the verge and the half-submerged Indians were straining in the final shove, some one slipped. The boat swung, Instantly the current seized its advantage, throwing itself vindictively against the quartering side of the ponderous craft, which had been meeting it bow on.

Portonio, standing in the stern and pushing with a pole set against a rock behind, found the tough wood bending like a reed. Then it snapped. A simultaneous gasping grunt from the Maquiritares—a short, hoarse cry of agony—the dugout was hurled backward.

THREE of the Maquiritares, swept away with it, instinctively retained their holds on the gunwales. The fourth, crushed against a grim gray bowlder, collapsed and slid limply down in the current.

Bumping, cracking as if about to split asunder, half swamped by triumphantly leaping waves, the boat wallowed back through the welter, somehow refraining from complete capsize. Before it was fairly free of the white water McKay and Knowlton leaped overboard, throwing themselves toward the inert body of the crushed canoeman. Together they reached him, seized him, and struck out shoreward.

Swept into smooth water, they swam slantingly across, carried down by the speed of the flow, but unharmed. Meanwhile Portonio, thrown headlong into the stream, came up and battled his way to the bow; seized the long rope, pulled it overboard, and, with the end in his teeth, cast himself loose again and swam for the nearest rock. To him the fate of an Indian was nothing, the fate of his boat everything.

Reaching his objective, he got a firm foothold on the stone, twisted the rope about his hands, put forth his vast strength, and halted canoe, baggage, and Indians in the teeth of the current. And he remained there, a straining Hercules, until the Maquiritares drew themselves hand over hand up the taut rope and joined him. Then they hauled up the water-logged dugout and swung it in to shore.

A low, smooth stone at the foot of the bank formed the death-bed of the Indian borne by Knowlton and McKay. Breathing hard, they drew themselves and their burden out on the rock; and there, after one glance, McKay panted:

"No use. Smashed to pulp. Gone."

But the victim was not yet gone. His lids fluttered open. His agonized gaze passed over his rescuers, fastened on Knowlton. Into his graying face came a look of supreme effort. From his mouth burst a red stream. Then, in a gurgling whisper, came words.

"No—montañ'—habl'—no—muert'——"

Another red eruption A brief struggle. He was dead.

"No mountain speak no death ——" mechanically translated Knowlton. "Meaning what?"

McKay shook his head. They turned their eyes upstream, watching the landing of the others. Beyond the *raudal* León had brought his boat to the bank, and as soon as it was tied he and the others came cutting their way along the top. The Maquiritares of the ill-fated canoe also came as quickly as they could. Only Portonio remained behind, more concerned with bailing and setting things to rights than with viewing a dead man.

Around that lifeless figure the other voyagers clustered in silence. León, sober-faced, stooped and made a brief examination; then, rising again, gestured up the bank. The Indians, unspeaking, dug foot-holds and formed a line up the stiff slope, and from man to man the body was lifted to the top. There, preceded by a couple of machete-men and escorted by the rest of his comrades, the victim of the *raudal* was borne away into the forest.

For a little time the four below remained

on the rock, while the sun dried out the wet clothing of McKay and Knowlton. León said nothing, but he was manifestly grieved by the fate of his faithful employe. At length McKay, without preamble, disclosed the unintelligible warning voiced by the man now gone.

The Spaniard frowned and stared blankly at the water, obviously as much in the dark as his companions.

"It means nothing to me," he slowly said. "We are going into mountains, but I do not understand— Those words might mean several different things, and none of them makes sense to me. And why should he speak of the mountains? I have not yet told my men that we go there. They know only that we go to Uaunana, a tribe-house on the Ventuari, where I am well known and well liked. Perhaps he was trying to say *montañés*, not *montañas*— people living in mountains. But all the Maquiritare nation lives in mountainous country, so that means nothing. Or perhaps he meant— Oh, *quién sabe?* There is no answer to the riddle."

"Where are those mountains?" quizzed McKay.

"Mountains are all about us, friend. But the ones I mean are at the south; eight days south on the Rio Periqueta, and some days farther by land. I have never been there. It is one of the places where I am not allowed to go."

"Oho! Forbidden ground!" exclaimed Knowlton.

"*Sí.* But until this moment none but myself has known that I plan to go there. My men still do not know it. So why, in the ——'s name, should poor Curro have warned us against mountains? Bah! It was no warning. His mind wandered. '*Hablo—no—muerte*' meant 'I can not talk— death takes me', and the other words were nonsense."

Turning, he moodily clambered up the bank. The others followed. Among the shadows beyond, nothing was visible. In single file they moved up toward the boats. The warning which was no warning was dismissed from their talk.

But it was not dismissed from their thoughts as well. Each eyed the river and the sombre depths beyond with frowning brow. Perhaps, as León had said, the dying man's mind had been deranged, and the sons of Guayana knew nothing of the white men's goal. Yet those white men felt that old Guayana herself knew, and that she had begun to take toll.

CHAPTER IX

A VOICE IN THE NIGHT

THE gloom cast over the expedition by the tragedy at the *raúdalito* traveled onward with it. Although every man in the party was accustomed to the violent deaths of the tropic wilderness, the fate of Curro had struck with such suddenness that it lingered long in the minds of his companions. Moreover, Curro himself had been a most likable young fellow; merry-hearted, lively, given to occasional pranks which vastly amused his mates and brought smiles even to the faces of the señores. Now the Maquiritares no longer laughed, and the boats forged ahead in sober quiet.

There was no further talk, however, concerning the man who had passed out. The Marquiritares, on returning from the dusky depths wherein they had completed their last service to the fallen, manned the fatal canoe in force and rammed it up over the barrier with an impetus bespeaking smouldering wrath against the murderous river. Thereafter they conquered every new obstruction with due watchfulness to their footing.

As for Curro, he was dead and there was an end to him, so there was no use in talking about one who no longer existed; such was their philosophy. The white men felt much the same way, both as to Curro and his last words. Those words had been once discussed, and no satisfactory explanation of them had yet occurred to anyone. Yet they arose time and again in the minds of Northerners and Southerners alike, and their effect was not cheering.

"I don't want to do no croakin', fellers," Tim declared at the next night stop, "but them omens that Loco was talkin' about, back yonder, don't look so good. First there's that snake in the path; and then them three poisoned guys trailin' us like ol' man Hard Luck; and then this thing today, and that warnin'—ye can't tell me it don't mean nothin', Loco. A feller busted as bad as he was don't talk jest for exercise; unless he's got somethin' mighty important on his mind he don't say a word. But gittin'

back to omens, d'ye mind how many of us there is now? Thirteen!"

Slow nods concurred. Knowlton, however, laughed shortly.

"Feet getting chilly?" he derided.

"Not much. When ye see li'l Timmy Ryan droppin' out with frozen toes it'll be in a colder place than this. I'm jest sayin' the same things that all you guys are thinkin'."

"True enough," agreed León. "We all are thinking of those things. And if you would like to turn back——"

"Rot!" snapped McKay, his back stiffening. So decisive was his tone that the Spaniard chuckled softly and said no more. The next day the thirteen resumed their dogged journeying.

As ever, their course was obstructed by *raudalitos;* and steadily, imperceptibly, the forest on either hand crept nearer, as if the banks were gradually closing on prey which they would presently crush to nothing. Yet no further misfortune befell.

And now Guayana dangled before the seekers of the lost white race a lure to draw them on; for the seemingly empty wilderness began to show infrequent indications that behind its baffling curtain lived men. Caught among snags lay a cracked, useless shell which once had been a good *curial.* At a creek mouth stood a small pole hut roofed with withered plantain leaves—a *ranchería,* or landing spot for Indians during the low-water stage when the *caño* itself was unnavigable. On a large low rock where the travelers lunched were found fish-bones, feathers, and dead embers of a cook-fire.

Of the men who had used these things there was neither sight nor sound along the waterway. And, though it was quite apparent that on some of the creeks were human habitations, the canoes held to their course, León stating briefly that side trips here were not worth while.

TWO days after leaving the savanna, however, the boats turned into a *caño* at the left, stopping at an ancient-looking *ranchería,* from which a thread-like path led away into the jungle. Above that *caño* and beyond a big bend in the river, the Spaniard explained, was a long and absolutely impassable *raudal,* named Monoblanco; and around that death-hole all men must detour by a forest trail.

"Good enough!" yawned Knowlton. "I'm sick of riding. I want to stretch my legs again."

"The legs will be stretched, never fear," smiled the Ventuari veteran. "This is no stroll like that around Equencua. It is a hard day's march." Casting a reflective eye at the labyrinth around, he added: "This is the place where I had it in my mind to leave everything we can spare. We must come by this way when we return. And beyond here we must carry no useless weights."

The Americans, after studying the heap of duffle put ashore by the Indians, acquiesced.

"Good idea to have a general overhauling here," said McKay, "and find out whether that crack-up in the *raudal* damaged anything by water. If so, we'll chuck it. Better boil down the outfit to absolute essentials, anyway."

They went to work, sorting over the contents of trunks and packsacks; and almost immediately they made a discovery which evoked wrathful remarks. The top of a supposedly air-tight tin, containing all the spare batteries for their electric flashlights, had worked open somewhere between the Caño Negro and the man-killing *raudalito,* and enough water had sneaked into the can to ruin all its contents. A test of the torches themselves showed the light remaining in them to be very weak; another day or two would finish them.

So, perforce, they abandoned the nickeled cases here, to rely henceforth on the single weak lantern of the Spaniard. With considerable anxiety they inspected their supply of matches and the ammunition, and it was with vast relief that they found these well-nigh vital reserves to be unharmed.

While his comrades proceeded with their work of inspection and selection, León superintended the construction of the cache. A short distance from the path, atop a little hillock, the Indians built a stout pole table. On this were set the trunks, half the remaining cans of food, and whatever else could be dispensed with for a time. Within the trunks were left all the photographic chemicals, as León suggested that pictorial opportunities would be comparatively few during the succeeding days, and the films exposed could be kept undeveloped for some time without appreciable deterioration.

As for food, a new supply of cassava could be laid in at the Uaunana settlement above here, and sufficient game would undoubtedly be met to furnish necessary meat. He himself left most of his rice, which seemed to be his mainstay as travel provender. Over all was fastened a poncho; bushes were bent down and cunningly tied to conceal the table more thoroughly; and on the ground were strewn sections of bristling macanilla bark, its myriad black thorns lying point upward, as a discouragement to prowlers.

This done, the travelers slept in the old *ranchería;* and the next morning they were off on their march. Before it was done, León had more than kept his promise to stretch the legs of his boat-weary companions.

At the start, the Indians took the lead, the Spaniard trailing behind them at the head of the civilized contingent. As they progressed, the wisdom of this became increasingly apparent; for not only was the trail so dim as to be hardly visible, but it was beset by traps. Not actual traps in the usual sense of steel or logs or pits, were these, but cunning false trails, the deadliness of which speedily became evident to the jungle-wise eyes of the former Amazon rovers.

The land was a maze of steep hills, dense forest and bush, and myriad streams flowing crazily along the snaky ravines; and it was at these streams that the snares were laid. No bridges crossed them; the path invariably led straight to them, broke off abruptly, and, actually or seemingly, recommenced directly opposite, on the farther shore; but fully half of these continuations were blind leads which faded out a few yards beyond, all the more deceptive because of the fact that other such openings were real. No eye unfamiliar with the entire route—not even that of a jungle Indian, if he was a stranger to this section—could have followed it without confusion; and confusion meant complete and hopeless loss of all bearings.

The Marquiritares, however, picked unerringly the false from the true. Where those deceitful lures lay so invitingly plain, they turned sharp to right or left, wading up or down the crooked watercourses until they passed around an abrupt turn; then they went ashore at some spot where the trail hid behind a bush, or where a rock or an old blow-down revealed no trail at all. Invariably a couple of strides beyond the bank revealed the true path once more, but at the edge itself was visible no sign.

"By cripes!" panted Tim, after struggling up over a bleached snag at the tenth such concealed entrance. "These guys ain't sociable! With all them man-killin' places down river to buck against, ye'd think they might leave a decent path along here for fellers that lived to git this far. But this lay-out would trip up the —— himself."

"That is the desire of these people," responded León. "To trip up any —— of a white man who may chance to come so far —or any brown —— of a Guaharibo. Those Guaharibos are savage beasts from the south who come northward at times to kill and rob. And as for white men—I have told you that this country is closed to them.

"Once, for instance, a man from San Fernando came here, trying to reach the Rio Caura and so go to the lower Orinoco. He was fleeing to escape enemies who were hunting him in the San Fernando region. He reached this spot—and vanished. Indians coming overland by this path heard him screaming in the forest, lost and mad. They did not go near him. They left him to scream and rave and die, because they knew he must be some white man. We may be within ten feet of his bones at this minute."

The others glanced with narrowing eyes at the bewildering thicket hemming them in. Truly, those bones might be even nearer than León suggested, and still be unseen. So might their own lie for centuries if they should meet with mishap here. Among these steep slopes, sinuous streams, tangled growths and deluding paths, a whole party could disappear as irrevocably as one man, without the slightest hostility by the Maquiritares themselves.

The menacing jungle itself was their ally. About it hung the dankness, the clammy chill, of a tomb. Rain had passed in the night, and now, though the eastern sun was spraying its beams through all the leafy interstices, from the high branches still fell a monotonous drip, drip, drip of cold moisture.

The tongue-like foliage brushing against them as they walked, the squirming vines, the long dangling *lianas*, seemed merciless creatures stealthily reaching to enmesh them and suck their life-blood. Inscrutable, implacable, the forest brooded and waited for

its invaders to slip, to stray, to fall and perish in its clutch.

It waited in vain, for the moving chain crept on—up slimy clay hills where hands seized trees and feet dug for holds, down precipitous slants where the bare-heeled Indians slid and stumbled, along the sides of other sharp grades—climbing, dropping, wading, winding, but never losing a link, never going stray. At noon it halted a little while beside a cool, clear *cañito*, a little creek, to rest, eat, drink, smoke.

Then onward it wound until late afternoon. In all the traverse was heard no sound of beast or bird save one heavy rush among the bushes—a tapir, perhaps—and a toucan yelping somewhere in the branches like a scared, miserable puppy calling for protection from nameless horrors.

AT LAST, abruptly, the party debouched into a tiny opening where a dilapidated *ranchería* leaned awry. Beyond seemed to lie another ravine, a wide one, densely timbered on the farther side.

On approaching the edge of the drop, however, the Northerners found below them a smooth but swift stream, at the edge of which floated a cracked dugout. At first sight it appeared to be only a broad *caño*. But the speed and power of its flow, coupled with the presence of the canoe, prompted the conclusion that it was the river itself, grown much narrower above the long *raudal*. And so it was.

"Are your legs sufficiently stretched, señor?" asked León, himself hollow-eyed from the strenuous march.

"Quite," admitted Knowlton. "In fact, nearly wrenched loose from the hinges. That confounded boat-riding made 'em soft."

"Just so. Mine are much the same way, and for the same reason. But we shall all be stiff enough tomorrow." With which satiric comfort he eyed the old boat, then added: "As it happens, we must rest for a day or two here. That *curial* is useless for our purpose, and there is no other nearer than Uaunana. So we shall lie here while four of my boys go to Uaunana for better canoes."

"How long will that take?" asked McKay.

"Not more than a day and a half to go and return. We shall be at Uaunana in three days."

The others looked askance at the unattractive hole in the forest where they now stood, but made no comment—except Tim, who vouchsafed the declaration that he was game to lie in his hammock a week without a kick, and forthwith proceeded to have that hammock hung within the *ranchería*. The others likewise made their preparations for the night.

Followed a bath at the edge of the water and a donning of dry clothes; a patching of the roof by some of the Indians, while the others slipped away into the bush on a hunting trip; a cooking by Portonio of the best food remaining for his señores, and a broiling by the Indians of the meat they brought in for themselves—a spidery yellow *monoblanco* monkey, an agouti, and a number of small black tree-toads; then darkness, silence, and sleep.

At daybreak the Indians were up, and, after a quick breakfast, four of them bailed the suicidal-looking canoe and nonchalantly started away, stroking rapidly with the banjo-shaped paddles brought overland from the lower port.

The message they carried was succinct and imperative: That Loco León and three other white men, his friends, came to visit Uaunana; that these men were of good heart; that the best canoes must be sent at once for their use, and a house made ready for them.

After the departure of the paddlers, the rest gave themselves up to a lazy day which, after their recent toil, was far from unwelcome; for the muscles of the white men were as stiff and lame as the Spaniard had predicted, and the work-hardened Maquiritares themselves seemed sluggish.

In the afternoon, however, inactivity became monotonous, and all except Portonio, who remained as camp guard, went hunting. The resulting bag was small; but the stiff legs were limbered up and the dull languor replaced by healthy fatigue. Then again came night.

"The men have reached Uaunana before now," said León, thoughtfully, "and perhaps they have started back, for I told them to travel with all speed. It is not likely that they will try to come on after dark; the moon now is very late and weak. Yet perhaps we had best hang the lantern near the edge and let it burn."

Two or three hours slipped past, the lantern shining bright amid the dense gloom

enshrouding forest and shore. High over the river, thousands of stars gleamed in a marvelously clear sky, dropping a faint radiance to the water; but beneath the trees lay only blackness. At their end of the dusky *ranchería* the Indians slept, two in a hammock, deriving mutual warmth from each other's body. At the other end, the men of the superior race lay wakeful, Tim yarning away about the war, a topic which always interested León. But all at once both Venezuelans turned their heads riverward. Tim hushed and listened.

For a moment all was still. Then came faint sounds as of guarded voices, a muffled bump of wood on wood, a slight swashing noise, a rustle among bushes—all vague, and all from the other side of the stream.

"A *curial*. But not our men," León said softly. "They would have shouted and come to the light. Make no moves. We are out of sight, and ——"

He paused, listening again. McKay, holding a lighted pipe, covered its red coal with one hand. The rest lay motionless. From across the river came no further sound.

Minutes snailed away, the listeners hardly breathing. Then the stillness was shattered by a harsh yell that made every man jump.

"Loco León!"

León made no answer for a moment. The voice rasped again—loud, impatient, ugly.

"Loco León!"

"*Sí*," acknowledged León, speaking calmly and clearly. "*Quién es?*"

The reply sent a chill shuddering up the spines of the tense men in the hut. It came in tones frightful with madness and a howl of horrible laughter.

"Death! Death! Black death! A dead man walking in the night! A dead man without a face! A corpse crawling on the water! Yah-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!"

CHAPTER X

A DEAD MAN WALKS

IN THE momentary hush following that ghastly yell from the dark, Tim Ryan and Portonio Mariño involuntarily made an odd movement. Veterans, both of them, of many a weird experience in mysterious jungles, hard-headed and irreligious, fearing few things known or unknown, yet they now crossed themselves as if confronted by a fiend.

McKay and Knowlton, born to a different creed, gave no such acknowledgment of faith in powers celestial or infernal; but they, too, betrayed misgiving, for they started up, muttering:

"Good ——! What is it?"

The Indians, roused from slumber, shrank against each other at the sound of the maniacal laughter. Only León remained apparently unmoved.

Into the minds of all, except, perhaps, the blond Spaniard, had leaped the thought of the lost man who, with mind wrecked by despair, had wandered screaming through this grim forest until silenced by some unknown doom. And now—

"A dead man walking in the night! A dead man without a face!" Cold sweat broke out on drawn brows, and dilated eyes stared toward the mockingly useless lantern beyond which nothing was visible.

León spoke again—and, in speaking revealed that he was not immune to the nerve-strain gripping the rest of the company; for in his voice was a slight quiver. His words, however, were as calm as before.

"Good evening, White," he called, in English. "Come to this side and talk. Here are countrymen of yours—three men from North America."

A silence. Then a harsh, chuckling laugh.

"Huh-huh-huh! Fools! More fools coming to lose their faces! And you too, Loco—you're gone! Right now, you fool—you're as dead as I am! Your time's up! You're through, like those idiots with you! Five dead men now: Black White and Loco León and three more! Ah-ha-ha-ha-ha!"

The wild mirth rang loud and high, then ceased abruptly. Dead silence hung heavy along both the unseen shores. Even the tree-toads, which had twittered and cheeped ever since sundown, were stricken voiceless. At length León replied, his tones cool and controlled.

"My time has been up more than once, or so men said, but I still live. As for my fellow fools, they are of your own country, White. What have you against them?"

"My country?" jeered the voice. "Yah! What country has a dead man? I'm dead! Buried! My country—huh! Got nothing against you fools. But you're dead ones all

the same. After your faces are gone you can walk with me—howl to the moon with me! Arrrgh!"

The last inarticulate sound was a guttural snarl, more hideous than words. After another short pause León muttered:

"Worse. He grows much worse."

To the awful visitor he made no answer.

More minutes dragged away. From across the stream floated no sound. Within the hut no man moved. Then, with the same harsh abruptness, the voice tore again through the sable pall.

"León. You've got one chance! Back track! Get out of here! Down the river! Otherwise— Ugh! Huh huh huh!" Again that diabolical chuckle.

"Otherwise, what?" countered León. "Do you attack us?"

"Me? No. What for? I'm not so merciful! But you'll wish I had! He-he-he-he-ha-ha-ha! You'll wish I had—I'd kill you quick. But *they* won't. No! *They* won't! Uh-huh-huh-huh! Hah!"

"Who?" demanded the Spaniard.

No answer; only a sour growl, as if the mad mind over there had tired of talk; but no words. León sat peering fixedly past the lantern. In the silence of the hut sounded a slight rustle of clothing. McKay, facing toward the river, was rising to full height.

"You, over there!" he snapped. "Are you American?"

A grunt. Then rasping words.

"I was. Dead now. Who are you?"

"An American. Named McKay. Come over here and let's look at you."

The command seemed to infuriate the prowler. He voiced a ferine snarl.

"Look at me? You —— half-wit! Look at Death! No white man sees me and lives!"

"Señor! Have care!" warned León. "He speaks truth."

The tall Scot frowned down at him. Knowlton and Tim, as if moved by a subconscious impulse which prompted these three to stand together in everything, rose to their feet and stepped toward their comrade.

"Bunk!" scoffed McKay. "You, there! White! Will you come over here, or do we have to come and get you?"

A wild shriek of laughter was the retort—a jeering ululation that rang eerily among the trees.

"Come and get me?" howled the voice. "Hah, yes! Come and get me! Ya-ha!"

"Blah-blah! Ye yeller-bellied fish!" erupted Tim, his previous dread giving way to anger at the sneering tone. "Show yer ugly mug in the light if ye've got any guts, instead o' yowlin' there like a banshee! What ye scairt of? We won't hurt ye. Come acrost like a man, even if ye ain't one!"

An instant of ominous silence. Then ——

Smash! Crack!

The lantern shattered. A gunshot snapped; the keen report of a high-powered rifle. Instant darkness fell. And from that darkness roared the voice, savage now with rage.

"Man? I'm a better man than you and all your gang! I'll fight the whole —— pack of you! Come on, all of you! Shoot it out with a dead man! A dead man walking in the night! Yah! Hah! Fight, you yapping puppies! Show *your* faces! Fight, you ——"

A torrent of epithets and taunts followed, terminating in a screech and another shot. The bullet smacked into a tree beside the hut. With muttered exclamations, the Northerners, and Portonio as well, groped for their rifles. But León intervened.

"Señores!" he warned. "If you fight that man you are no longer my *compañeros*. He is mad, loco, twisted in the brain. Let me handle him." Raising his voice, he went on: "White! Go your way. We go ours. There is no fighting between us. Do no more shooting, unless you wish to throw away bullets. We are behind trees."

A wordless, mumbling growl floated back. After a minute or two came another chuckle, contemptous, sneering, more biting than a curse.

"All right. Lie there on your bellies and hug the ground. Mouth-fighters! Huh huh huh! You'll get yours! You'll get plenty! Arrrgh!"

Not another sound drifted across the water. Time dragged past. Within the hut passed muttered remarks among the whites, hoarse whispers among the Indians. Without, the toads resumed their bird-like twittering. At length León sat down in his hammock, deftly made a cigaret, and, without attempt at concealment, lighted it. The ignited match seemed to cast a wide illumination, and its flare could hardly have failed to catch any watching eye.

Yet it evoked neither shot nor voice from over the river.

"Cut it out!" admonished Tim, his old army inhibitions instinctively hostile to the telltale light. "Want to make us targets?"

The Spaniard, with mocking deliberation, held the tiny torch a second longer, then carelessly dropped it. After a long inhalation of smoke, which he drew deep into his lungs as if his nerves clamored for it, he coolly replied:

"There is no longer any one over there. Our friend has gone."

"Yeah? Jest flew away, huh, without flappin' his wings or nothin'? Fat chance! If he's human he's got to go back up river, and he can't do that without some thumpin' and splashin' ——"

León arose; walked to the edge of the bank, where the star-sheen now made the water visible; lighted another match, and held it until it burned out. From the farther side came no noises. Obviously the river now was empty.

"They have simply floated away downstream," he said, returning. "The *raudal* is half a mile below here. They can go ashore before reaching it."

"They?" echoed Knowlton.

"Yes. He has paddlers, of course. And if they are his regular men, they have rifles. And Black White's men can shoot."

"So can we," retorted the ex-lieutenant. "But who and what is this Black White? Evidently he's an American, and crazy as a coot. But how— What do you know about him?"

The Ventuari man did not answer at once. He smoked a while, the repeated glow of his cigaret dimly reflecting from his narrow-lidded eyes. At length he replied:

"Much. And yet little. He came here, some years ago, from your United States, to explore along the Rio Caura and learn its resources for some North American company. He strayed over this Ventuari country, and—he was not wise. He was a very handsome man, señores, and accustomed to trifling with women. He trifled with a girl of the Maquiritares, and— Do you remember those black men of the Caño Cerbatana?"

A pause.

"Good Lord! You mean the girl turned him black?"

"Just so, señor. And, as I have said, he was very handsome, and very proud of it. When he found himself repulsive his brain cracked. He has never left these hills, and never will. He allows none but Indians to see him. When he told you that it was death to look at him, he meant exactly that. He will kill any white man who sees him.

"And when you told him to come and he looked at—when you jeered at his 'ugly mug' and called him no man—señores, you might better slap a *tigre* in the face than use such words to Black White. It was more cruel than to taunt a blind man about his blindness, and also much more dangerous; a blind man cannot strike you, while Black White can and will."

"All of which you might have told us before we met him," countered McKay. "As for striking, let him strike. He'll get a come-back."

"And as for telling him to come over here, the first one of us who did that was one Loco León," reminded Knowlton.

"That is true, señor. But I did not tell him to come into the light. He could have talked to us from the bush, unseen. He knew what I meant. I have talked with him in that way before."

With that he turned away as if a bit nettled. And not another word would he speak concerning Black White.

"Wal, as far as that 'ugly mug' stuff o' mine goes, the guy had it comin' to him," rumbled Tim. "He said he didn't have no face at all. Cripes! D'ye s'pose that's so? S'pose he's clawed his face off in one o' his spells? Or——"

"Oh, for ——'s sake, shut up!" protested Knowlton. "I'll be crazy myself if you keep up that line of talk. Pipe down! Let's talk sense or nothing. Better nothing. For all we know, that nut is ashore on this side and sneaking up on us. The less talk the better."

"Right!" McKay agreed. "We'll stand guard the rest of the night. It's now—" he peered at his luminous-numeraled watch —"it's nine-thirty. I'll take first trick. Merry, second. Tim, third. Now dry up, everybody, and sleep with your mouths shut."

HE FOUND his rifle and took post at a corner. The others, with weapons close at hand, lay down; but it was long before any of the white men slept, for through each mind kept racing

facts and fancies not conducive to rest. Portonio, least imaginative of the five, was first to sink into slumber. The rest dropped off one by one. As for the Indians, they had given no sign of wakefulness after their master's match-lighting had proved there was no further immediate cause for alarm.

For three monotonous hours McKay stood his watch, motionless save for an occasional change of posture. To his ears came only the usual scattered sounds of the tropic night, sometimes weird and unexplainable, always unhuman. Half an hour after midnight he stepped to Knowlton, prodded him lightly, muttered "All well," and relaxed in his hammock. Three hours later Knowlton woke Tim in the same manner, and the Irishman took up the futile vigil. In all those long hours no sight or sound of lurking danger came to any of the three.

Dawn. Tim yawned, turned his back on the forest taking shape in the half-light, and voiced a stentorian bellow.

"Ro-o-oll out! Rise and shine, ye hammick-huggin' galliwampuses! Day's here, and yer scalps are still on yer cocos. Shake a leg and make some coffee for the poor ol' soldier!"

At the impact of his voice every man started awake; stared blankly an instant; then relaxed, or arose and stretched.

"I hope, señores, that you spent a pleasant and amusing night?" twitted León grinning at the three sentinels. "I slept most soundly."

"Glad to hear it," was McKay's dry retort. "I had an interesting time thinking about things. One thing I thought about was this: I'm tired of trailing along in the dark, León. I want to know what's ahead. Exactly what do you plan to do from now on?"

"A fair question," acknowledged the Spaniard. "I, too, thought before I slept that it would be well to make things clear. My plans, then, are simple and short: To go first to Uaunana, where you may see Maquiritares in their homes; also, if possible, to get men there who will guide us up the Rio Periqueta; then—whether we get such men or not—to go up the Periqueta, and find what we may.

"Of the Periqueta I know no more than you, except that it enters this Ventuari a little way above here, comes in from the south, and is said to be eight days long. It is in the south that the *blancos puros*, the pure whites, live. Yes, señores, there are such people—a few. I have seen one of them and heard of others. But I know nothing of their land."

"Where did you see that one?"

"At Uaunana, last year. He had light brown hair and blue eyes. He left almost as soon as I came, and he would not talk to me. Why he was there I never could learn. And now, señores, you know as much as I." He arose and stretched his muscles, tacitly dismissing the subject.

"Good enough, and thanks. Since you've loosened up, we may as well tell you in return that we've known for some time that there are such people."

"How did you learn?" The Spaniard's eyes were suddenly sharp.

"Easy," Tim boasted. "I jest asked them Tamara guys down at yer headquarters. Twenty days travel, they said."

León stood very still, a startled expression on his face.

"The Tamara men," he repeated, slowly. "You asked them! And they went—" He paused, a frown furrowing his brow. Then he shrugged. "*Bien.* It is done. So we go on and see what we may see."

"Yeah! And we're goin' to see the whole works while we're here, feller. Turn this here country wrong side out and look at its gizzard. That's us. And that there warblin' cuckoo of a Black White, we might see him yet, too. Here's hopin'. I want to git close to that guy once."

Before any one could answer, the shadowy forest itself gave a startling reply. Came a rapid series of soft impacts—the sound of something darting through air and striking leaf-tips in its flight. Then a small but solid thump. Tim started; then sprang around. Something had dealt him a stinging blow between the shoulders.

"What the ——'s that?" he gasped, throwing a hand behind him to feel the smitten spot. Then his eyes dropped, and he grunted in mingled amazement and relief. On the ground lay a rifle cartridge.

"Gee cripes! Somebody's heavin' whole cartridges. And, begorry, it's a thirty, or I never handled a Springfield!"

He pounced on the conical cylinder of brass and nickeled lead, glanced at it, threw it behind him to the others, and crouched with rifle up and eyes searching

the misty maze beyond. A barely audible rustle sounded; but no sway of bush-branches was visible. The faint sound died.

McKay, catching the cartridge, gave it one look and held it toward Knowlton and León. As Tim had said, it was of .30 caliber.

"The guns of Black White and his gang," León said, in a quiet tone, "are thirties. While you have watched all night for him without seeing him, he has come here and stood almost beside you; stayed as long as he liked, heard what he waited to hear—and now has gone again. It is his way."

He had hardly finished speaking when the jungle corroborated his words. From some point not far off, yet some distance from the spot where the thrower of that missile must have stood, broke a shriek of receding, blood-chilling laughter.

"Yah-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! Blind! Blind! Fools! Yee-he-he-ha-ha-hah!"

CHAPTER XI

THE HIGHLANDERS

TIM, eyes glimmering and jaw pugnacious, tramped with wrathful stride into the forest. The flying cartridge had struck him with its sharp point first, dealing so keen a twinge that his first shocked thought had been of the attack he most dreaded—a poisoned dart in the back; and now he was aflame with red rage. McKay, Knowlton, and Portonio seized their weapons and followed him. León, smiling sarcastically, remained where he was, and so did the Indians.

Half an hour's floundering in the pathless tangle resulted only in a grudging abandonment of the search. Not even a footprint was found. Not another human sound was heard. So the hunters returned to camp, ate breakfast, and spent the next few hours in lolling about.

Near noon, a sudden chorus of wild yells from upstream startled the drowsy camp into a swift reach for guns. Hands quickly relaxed; however, after the first momentary start of surprize; for it was self-evident that no hostile party would thus announce its approach. A few minutes later two canoes came sliding along close to shore and stopped at the mouth of the little gap. From them debarked the four Maquiritares sent away yesterday by León.

No other Indians accompanied them. The men of Uaunana obviously were not in the habit of sending representatives to welcome visitors. Yet the dugouts which they had furnished were excellent, one being so new that its interior still retained the char of the fires by which it had been hollowed out; and the paddlers announced that the hut ordered by León was being constructed for the use of the white men. Thus it was evident that the up-river people were not opposed to the coming of the travelers. Preparations for the noonday meal and for subsequent embarkation were begun at once.

"Are any *blondos* now at Uaunana?" asked León.

The eyes of the Maquiritares narrowed. After a minute Frasco, their leader, answered in the negative.

"*Bien.* Where did you meet El Blanco Negro, the black white man?"

Silence. The four looked blank. At length Frasco replied:

"We have not seen him."

León gave each a piercing gaze, then turned away. They gravitated toward their mates who had remained at the camp, and a murmur of unintelligible conversation began. From the gestures of one of the latter toward the river, then toward the spot where that last frightful peal of mirth had been heard at dawn, it was apparent that the visit of Black White was under discussion; and the exclamations and expressions of the others bore out their assertion that they had known nothing of that wild man's presence on the Ventuari.

"Queer," commented Knowlton. "They went upstream, and White came downstream, and yet these fellows don't know anything about him. If he didn't meet them, how did he know you were here? And where did he come from, and why?"

"*Quién sabe?*" shrugged the Spaniard, who had been covertly listening to the Maquiritare jargon. "I am sure that these boys speak truth. Perhaps he saw them without their seeimg him, while they paused somewhere to eat, and listened to their talk as he listened to ours this morning. He might have come from anywhere. He is a *tigre:* here today, there tomorrow——"

"Huh!" broke in Tim, smitten by a sudden thought. "A black *tigre!* Talk about omens! D'ye mind that night down below, when we slept on the sand and a *tigre* swum

over to mop us up? 'Twas a black one! And he sure was hostile. There's an omen for ye."

Knowlton laughed shortly.

"Yes, and you remember what happened to Señor Tigre, don't you?" he jeered. "His black hide is stretched in one of León's houses at Caño Negro. Three poohpoohs and a loud bah for omens! Let's eat and travel."

And eat and travel they did. As the canoes swung out into the stream, the voyagers took a long look backward, half expecting to spy another dugout lying half concealed at some spot farther down, or a weird face peering at them from the bush. But they saw only empty water sweeping away around a bend, and blank jungle glooming along the shores. Facing forward, they left the mysterious forest of Monoblanco to brood upon its sinister secrets.

Steadily the paddles chunked against the gunwales, the rhythm ceasing only when some *raudalito* was met. Though now very narrow, the stream made up in depth what it lacked in width, and no poling was possible. The shores, at first rising into steep hillsides on either hand, gradually sank to lower levels, but at no place revealed any thinning of the rank growth. The only openings were the mouths of little creeks.

At length, however, a wider gap appeared at the right: a waterway as wide as the Ventuari itself, and as wild. No *ranchería*, no cooking tripod, no other sign of man stood at its junction with the master stream, and to all appearances it was utterly uninhabited. Yet this, León said, was the Rio Periqueta.

With pulses quickening, the three trailers of the centuries-old legend gazed up the flowing road to the land of the lost whites. For only a short way its water gleamed under the westering sun; beyond, where it disappeared behind a curve, the forest seemed to close together, jealously hiding it from spying eyes.

In its emptiness, its silence, and its aloof concealment, the Periqueta seemed sullen and forbidding, yet grimly tempting. Until it had vanished into the receding shore the Northerners watched it without words. And, without words, the Indians exchanged glances and put another ounce of power into the strokes with which they left it behind.

Night found the party ensconced in another dilapidated *ranchería*—the first one seen since their departure that noon, and the last they were to find on this river. As the darkness deepened, Tim inched back the breechbolt of his rifle, assured himself that the top cartridge lay ready, and shut the piece with an emphatic click.

"That there shell's the one Old Calamity throwed at me this mornin'," he declared, "and as sure as he comes round here spoilin' me sleep tonight I'll hand it back to him, hot. Nut or no nut, he ain't going to git gay with Timmy Ryan no more without a come-back. Once is plenty."

"He will not disturb us," León replied, easily. "He is too wily. If ever we hear him again, it will be at a time most unexpected. It will not be tonight."

The prediction proved truth. Not once that night was their rest disturbed.

Another noon, and they were struggling up over a five-foot barrier where white cascades fought them with vindictive rage. It was the last fierce, futile attempt of the Ventuari to hurl them back. A little way beyond, at the left, opened the mouth of a seemingly empty *caño;* and into this the boats turned.

A hundred yards inland they stopped at a muddy landing-place where floated a couple of other dugouts. Up a stiff slope led a well-trodden path, climbing until lost to sight beyond the heavy-leaved branches of the nearer trees.

"So we come to Uaunana," announced León. "The *paragua* is at the top of the hill. You will find its people friendly, but watchful; good-humored, but resolute and merciless if angered. Let no misunderstandings come about."

LEAVING the paddlers and Portonio to unload and transport the duffle, he led the way up the hillside. For the first forty or fifty feet the climb was arduous. Then, emerging from the timber into a big clearing, the visitors found the slant less precipitous.

Before them lay a chaos of prone, bleached trunks—the big trees laboriously felled by fire when the settlement had been made, and since then bereft of their branches—among which the path wormed its way upward to the summit; and, on that crest, stood a wide mud house whose palm-thatch roof rose in a broad cone. Beside

that house stood three or four dwarfish-looking figures, watching the approach of the strangers. Nobody else was in sight, and the place was very still.

León called no greeting, waved no hand. Reaching the top, he paused, looking at the waiting Indians, who had not once moved. Deliberately one of them now sauntered forward: A short, well-muscled man of mature years and intelligent face, about whom hung an air of quiet authority. No plumes or other regalia indicated rank; he wore nothing but a short red clout and a pair of bead armlets, just below the shoulders; but the Northerners felt that this was the chief. And so he was.

"This is Juancito, *capitán* of the tribe of Uaunana," said León. "*Juancit', cómo está uste'?* How are you?"

"*Bien*," Juancito replied shortly. His brown eyes traveled slowly from face to face, searching each answering gaze.

"These *blancos* are my friends and men of good heart," the Spaniard told him.

The chief's steady scrutiny continued: calm, cool, dispassionate, revealing neither cordiality nor hostility. Not until he had formed his own judgment of each man facing him did he speak. Then, satisfied, he quietly said:

"*Es bueno.* It is good."

With a slow gesture he designated a new *ranchería*, a stone's throw from the big house, as the quarters of his guests.

Toward this the four proceeded, throwing a glance toward the other Uaunana men, who still stood where they had been. These, like their ruler, appeared totally unarmed. But at their feet, lying close against the clay wall of the house, lay a couple of brazilwood bows and a number of long arrows.

And now, among the jumbled trunks and stumps flanking the path by which the white men had just come, appeared half a score of other aborigines of whose presence there had been no sign; and every man of them had his bow and steel-tipped shafts. Scattered about fanwise at the backs of the visitors, concealed and protected by bullet-proof bulwarks, they could, at the first indication of treachery, have loosed at those strangers a silent blast of death.

With their ruler's acceptance of the Spaniard's companions as "men of good heart," these ambushed archers moved from left and right to the sinuous path and climbed it in file; walked into a small doorway in the tribe-house, and quickly emerged again, empty-handed. Thereafter they stood surveying León and his friends; remaining at some distance from the hut, silent, aloof, yet pleasant-faced. And out through the doorway, and from around the house, others came drifting noiselessly to join them.

León, with a glance at his comrades, put his rifle up overhead in a corner of the roof, concealing it from view. The Americans took the hint and placed their guns beside his. Among the Indians passed a slight smile of approval. Mutual disarmament betokened mutual friendliness, even though the weapons of both races lay where they could be seized and used with speed.

And when the Maquiritares of León came up the hill and set about hanging their hammocks and placing their goods as directed, the sight of their nonchalant familiarity with the outlanders reassured the Uaunanans still more. Although they had been told once by the messengers, and again by Loco León, that the Northerners were good men, so deep-rooted was their ancient distrust of white invaders that words were not sufficient. They must see those white men act like good men, see them treated as such by members of their own nation, before accepting the fact. Now they were seeing, and so, in part, believing.

The northerners, studying them with like interest, observed a marked variance of stature and feature, but an equally noticeable uniformity of color. Some few were hardly more than five feet in height; others rose a good two yards from their bare soles. The majority were fairly tall. So, too, with expressions: Some were heavy of face and patently slow of mentality, but more—in fact, most—had alert countenances betokening quick perceptions.

One and all were strongly built, well shaped, and remarkably light-skinned—lighter, indeed, than the Maquiritares of León; for these forest-dwellers were less exposed to the scorching sun than the Spaniard's boatmen. All, too, wore the short red clouts and the bead armlets, and nothing else. The barbarian appendages through the ear-lobes, which had characterized the rovers from the Caño Tamara, were not to be seen among these men of Uaunana.

Into the minds of the legend hunters

came again the thought that, except for their uniform darkness of hair and eye, these light, dignified, intelligent-looking men might well be the traditional "white race" of Guayana. There could be no question that they were as white as many an Orinoco *mestizo*, and far whiter than some halfbreeds in whose veins flowed the blood of Indians of the western and northern plains.

"A bright lookin' bunch, and not so homely, neither," declared Tim. "I'll take a look at their women any time they git over bein' shy. Where do they keep 'em?"

"Inside. They will come out when their men allow them," replied León. Then, to Juancito: "No *blondos* are here?"

The little chief's face tightened a trifle. Although he apparently knew little Spanish, it was plain that he understood this simple question. Yet, for a moment, it seemed that he would feign non-comprehension. At length, however, he curtly answered—

"No."

"No?" echoed the Spaniard. "Have any been here of late?"

No answer came. After a steady stare, Juancito turned coolly away, grunting a word to the others. To the *paragua* he walked, and into it; and after him went all his clansmen. The inquisitive newcomers were left alone.

"In other words," quoth McKay, "it's none of our business."

"That is the general idea, *Capitán*," acknowledged León, with a wry smile. "It is not a subject for talk between Maquiritares and white men. But there shall be talk, and soon. Let us eat, and then—we shall see."

And he sat in his hammock and speculatively eyed the tribe house.

CHAPTER XII

THE MESSENGER

WITH appetites satisfied by the contents of a couple of cans, the five sauntered around the *paragua* on a casual tour of inspection. They found its adobe wall to be perfectly circular, about eight feet in height, and pierced at eight equidistant points by openings—four doors and four windows.

Two of these doors, León explained, were exclusively for men, leading to a central room where all bachelors must sleep; the other two, which gave entrance to family quarters, could be entered by the women, children, and fathers. The point of the conical roof stood perhaps thirty feet above ground, and the circumference of the house, according to the estimate of McKay, who counted his paces, was somewhat over two hundred feet.

At intervals around it stood several smaller structures, all without walls, which seemed to be work-places; for within them were log troughs, pole tables, and, in the largest, a mud fireplace where the cassava-cooking evidently was done. From overhead hung large baskets, varying from pack size to long cylinders wherein the shredded *yuca* roots were squeezed.

In a couple of pack-baskets resting on the dirt floor of the cassava-house were big chunks of fresh *yuca*, as yet ungrated; and near by lay several graters—hand-cut boards, about two feet long, whereon had been cemented myriad tiny pebbles and points of steel. These obviously had been hastily abandoned by the woman workers as soon as word had come from some sentinel that the strangers were approaching.

No such sentry had been observed by the whites, but the laying of the ambush among the tree-trunks, as well as the evanishment of all women and children, made it quite manifest that some such watch of the river had been kept.

On their walk around the house, the visitors found the stout plank doors shut, and no face showed at any of the tiny windows. The portal opposite their own hut, however, had not been closed; and, on returning to their starting point, they found that their own Maquiritares had gone inside to visit the Uaunanans. The *ranchería* was deserted.

After a glance around, León coolly entered the *paragua*, signing to the others to follow. They did so—but not until McKay had given Portonio a gesture toward the hut, where the rifles lay unguarded. The riverman, with a grin of understanding, lounged away and lay down in a hammock.

Through a short passageway, walled on either side by tall partitions of bark, the four others walked. Then they emerged into a circular room surrounded by similar bark slabs, a good ten feet in height, and so cunningly joined that no opening was visible save another corridor directly opposite the

one by which they had entered: The other passage used by the males.

The room was shadowy, yet well lighted from a large smoke-hole at one side of the roof. It was well filled with men; some standing, some sitting on diminutive carved stools, some lying in cotton hammocks; all giving their attention to some utterance by one of León's boatmen, who, catching sight of his *patron*, now fell silent. With one accord the Uaunanans turned their eyes to the intruders, remaining motionless, and giving no indication of displeasure at the entrance of the uninvited guests.

"Juancito," spoke León.

The chief did not appear. One of the men, however, moved to the partition; grasped some projection invisible to the whites, pulled, and disclosed a narrow opening between the slabs. Through this he sidled, the bark closing behind him so tightly that the wall again seemed solid. Apparently the family quarters were beyond that partition, ranged around in a ring between it and the outer wall; and the chief was at present in his own private domicile.

Again the Northerners looked over the habitants, who returned their gaze with cool composure. Then came a slight sound at the bark, and Juancito entered, advancing with questioning gaze fixed on León.

"Frasco!" called the latter. Frasco came, and the rest of León's men with him. León himself sat down in a vacant hammock, as if preparing to talk for some time. Juancito took another one, facing him. Behind their ruler the men of Uaunana gathered into a compact group. The Americans stood where they were.

"Frasco, say these words to the *capitán*," began the trader, in slow Spanish. "For many moons now the Maquiritares have known Loco León to be their friend. They know that Loco León is not a friend to men of San Fernando or to any other men of evil heart. So they must know that when Loco León brings here men who are his friends, those friends must be men of good heart."

He paused. Frasco, in short gutturals, translated. Juancito seemed, however, to have followed the sense, if not all the words, of this preamble.

"*Bien*," he replied, without hesitation.

"*Bien.* Now Loco León and his friends go to the south to meet new people of Guayana. They go to see the *blondos*. They go with good in their hearts. They wish only to visit the *blondos* and then to come away."

Frasco stood silent so long that León gave him a stern look. When he spoke, it was reluctantly. And when he finished Juancito made no answer. His face seemed to harden.

"Once before now Loco León has seen a *blondo*," resumed the Spaniard. "That man was here at this *paragua*. Now Loco León has come to see if another *blondo* is here. There is none. But the men of Uaunana know the way up the Periqueta to the place where the white ones are. So León will take with him two men of Uaunana to show the way. Let Juancito pick those men."

His tone throughout was as casual as if he were proposing merely to cut down a balata tree. The expression which grew on the faces of Frasco and his mates, however, was not so calm. They looked perturbed. And Frasco, instead of translating, jerked out a warning reply.

"*Capitán! Es maluc'!* It is bad!"

"Speak my words to Juancito," tranquilly commanded León.

The interpreter seemed about to refuse. But his employer held him with steady, steely gaze; and presently the gutturals fell again from his tongue. As he concluded, a perceptible start ran among the Uaunanans. The group seemed to shrink together. Their chief's visage became stony.

"No," he curtly refused. "*Maluc'*."

His tone was final. Yet the Ventuari veteran seemed in nowise disconcerted. He talked again, mentioning the fine presents which he would give the lucky men who went with them; speaking again of his long friendship with the Maquiritares; dwelling on the fact that the Northerners came from far away and were not bad whites with evil in their hearts toward the people of Guayana. Frasco kept translating, although his unwillingness was plain to all. Juancito made no further replies, but his expression remained obdurate.

This went on for some time, León never raising his tone, never pleading, never arguing, but stating and restating the same proposition as if it were unanswerable and the outcome inevitable; Juancito giving not the slightest indication of yielding. The others, civilized and primitive alike, began to weary of it. Tim quietly moved away along the curving wall, looking at various

articles upon or along it; long lances, new-made paddles drying into shape, a small drum covered with monkey-hide, and similar things. Knowlton presently followed him, and after them drifted a number of Indians, watching them with interest.

Reaching the darkened passage where the door still was closed, Tim turned a questioning look to the nearest Uaunanan and waved toward the portal. The Indian stepped over and opened it. From outside came voices. Tim accelerated his gait; and Knowlton, suddenly seeing through the red man's nonchalant maneuvers, laughed silently and followed on. The voices were those of women.

At that moment a boy came through the bark, walked straight to Juancito, and spoke one word. The chief, without change of expression, rose at once and disappeared through the wall. The remaining Indians glanced at one another, but voiced not a single grunt. León and McKay, thus unceremoniously deserted, exchanged wry smiles and moved doorward.

"Looks as if we'd paddle our own canoe, for all the help we'll get here," said the Scot.

"It does," admitted the Spaniard. "But I shall try again. Ah! Your comrade Tim has found his women, I think. Let us see."

OUTSIDE, Tim and Knowlton stood surveying a number of short, chubby young women, wearing only small aprons, who apparently had decided that the presence of strange men must no longer be allowed to interfere with their daily duties, and who, therefore, had returned to the cassava work.

At the appearance of those strangers, however, they had halted every movement and stood like statues. For the moment they held their positions like figures in a tableau, viewing the whites with the same unreadable expressions first shown by their men. Then one of them made a brief remark, and their faces brightened with quick laughter. Their tense poise relaxed, and they resumed their motions—though they kept darting looks at the Northerners.

"Gee! Not so bad!" admired Tim. "Not — so — bad! Bobbed hair, begorry! Git it, looey? And one of 'em has rouged her face! Talk about lost white folks—these girls have got the Broadway make-up! And short skirts—oh, boy! They've got everything beat that I ever saw up home, even when the girls only wore 'em to their knees. Beads, too; solid beads; nothin' ordinary, like cloth, for these janes. Class, I'll say!"

True enough, the aprons were of solid bead-work, strung in striking geometric designs of contrasting colors, the figures being as regular as if formed by machines, and the whole garment depending from a girdle of more beads. Bead armlets similar to those of the men also were noticeable, and two of the girls wore bead necklaces. Otherwise they were unclothed; and the prevailing dark shades of the ornaments served to accentuate the fairness of their clear, clean skins. So, too, did the thick black hair, cut straight across the forehead and then at a slant which half concealed the ears. And one of them, as Tim had detected, was rouged quite becomingly with the scarlet paint derived from the pods of the annatto tree.

With the light smiles still lingering on their faces, they were far from bad looking. And, smiling or serious, they were by no means such uncouth, unkempt creatures as might perhaps be expected to exist in Indian lands.

"Yeah, I've seen lots worse than these girlies," Tim went on. "D'ye know, looey, I'm beginnin' to like this place. Folks are nice and friendly after ye git acquainted, I bet; and they're thawin' out already. I ain't in no hurry about movin' on."

"That, señor," dryly spoke León, behind him, "is what Black White once thought."

The red man started.

"Cripes! D'ye mean 'twas here that they fixed him?"

"Here. The girl was of Uaunana."

"Umph!" Tim eyed the girls again, not so admiringly now; indeed, he looked as if he had suddenly discovered that they possessed, instead of fingers, the claws of cats. And for some time he said not another word.

Having looked over McKay with the same attention they had previously given to Knowlton and Tim, the women affected to ignore them and went on with their work. For awhile the men stood and watched them; there was nothing else to do, and the sun slant was such that they were in comfortable shade.

The Indian men loitered near at hand, conversing briefly among themselves, watching their guests carelessly, awaiting

whatever move might come next. A few children appeared; then more women, moving about as if no visitors were present. Apparently Uaunana had decided that these friends of Loco León truly were "men of good heart" and need no longer be regarded with alert wariness.

At length the Northerners yawned and began moving along the wall. But just then the same boy who had summoned Juancito, perhaps his son, emerged from the house and spoke to Frasco. The latter informed León:

"The *capitán* wants you."

"*Bien.*" The Spaniard quickly reentered the *paragua*, followed by the Americans.

They found the chief standing in the middle of the room. Without preamble he spoke. Frasco showed astonishment. For a long minute he stood wordless, staring at the ruler of the place. Not until the latter spoke again, with a touch of harshness, did he repeat the words in Spanish.

"Two men will go on the Periqueta with León."

León's lashes flickered; but he gave no other indication of amazement at this unexplained about-face. He answered only with a quiet "*Bueno*," and, after a pause, asked who those two would be. This question caused considerable stir among the Uaunanans themselves, and it was quite manifest that none wished to go. Juancito, however, quieted the commotion with a few cryptic words which had marked effect.

The opposition seemed to fade out, and when the chief called two names a couple of tall fellows came forward—although with noticeable reluctance. All the others regarded the white men with an odd intensity.

"It is good," said León. "Tomorrow we go."

Nobody answered. The Spaniard strolled out, his comrades trailing him with the same assumption of insouciance. As they went, the Maquiritares of León scowled at Juancito. Frasco, indeed, glared at the chief as if ablaze with wrath. The latter met their eyes with stony expression and inflexible gaze.

"Well! That was sudden and complete," declared Knowlton, outside. "What do you make of it?"

"Only that we have what we want," shrugged León. "I have known him to change as suddenly before now, and for no reason that I could see. Now that he has made his promise, though, he will not change again."

The door by which they came out was the one where they had first gone in, and before them stood their hut, with Portonio lying languid in his hammock. Toward him they walked to give him the news.

"Sure takes life easy, that feller, chuckled Tim. "Bet ye he's been sleepin' all the time we've been gone."

But Portonio soon proved that he had not. He listened, with his usual easy smile, to McKay's brief statement that on the morrow they would start up the Periqueta with two guides from this place. Then he drawled:

"*Sí.* The *blondo* went to tell his people that we come?"

A silence, broken by Knowlton.

"What *blondo?*"

"The one who just came and went, señor."

"A *blondo?* Here?" demanded León.

"*Sí.* While you were in the *paragua.* An Indio came from the *caño.* I lay still, as if sleeping. He went around behind the house. Just now he ran down the hill to the *caño.* I thought you had talked with him inside. And you did not know he was here? Cra! I would have caught him if I had known that."

"A *blondo!*" repeated León.

"*Sí.* Tall and strong, with hair of gold."

The four stood speechless. While they had stood idly watching women work at the other side of the house, a mysterious courier of the white ones had been within speaking distance, unseen and unsuspected. And now he had vanished. It would be useless, they knew, to dash to the creek after him. By this time he and his canoe must be out on the Ventuari and speeding away.

And Juancito, summoned to conference with that man in some secret nook between the walls, had then made his abrupt change of front. Apparently the ban on white strangers to the Periqueta had been lifted. Yet why, in that case, had not the *blondo* remained here to guide those strangers? Why had he fled, aided by Juancito, who had given him a clear field by recalling the explorers to the interior? What was afoot now?

"Fellers," growled Tim, "I smell somethin' fishy on that there Periqueta. And

the minute we start up that river I'm goin' to strap on all the artillery I've got!"

CHAPTER XIII

THE RIVER OF DEMONS

ONCE more the dawn wind swept across the uplands of Guayana, bearing the discordant voices of waking creatures to the ears of those still asleep. Into the clearing of the Uaunana folk it dropped the squawks and screams breaking from the jungle at the eastward; then flowed on into the southwest.

Under the green roof of the pole *ranchería* three Americans and two Venezuelans opened their eyes, blinked at one another and at the tight-shut tribe house, yawned, and arose. Under the palm cone of the *paragua*, where the shadows still lay dense and the outer noises were deadened by the mud wall, the Maquiritares awoke more slowly.

In a corner of the hut Portonio kindled the morning coffee fire. As the water came to a boil, the nearest door of the tribe house opened. Several young fellows came forth, stood looking at the outlanders, and slowly drifted nearer. Another, stopping within the threshold, also watched the white men a moment, but then turned back into the central room, where the Maquiritares of León had slept with the others.

A little later the rear door was opened, and out through it filed six Indians. Keeping the house between them and the *ranchería*, they followed a foot-track winding away amid the stumps and trunks; reached the edge of the forest, and vanished into it. All were men of León.

Coffee, cassava, and cigarets finished, the white men glanced again at the loitering Uaunanans, then beyond them at the house.

"Where's all our gang?" wondered Knowlton. "Eating with their own crowd for once? First time I've known them to miss morning mess."

To the silent spectators León spoke, with a gesture doorward.

"Frasco," he said

Two men departed. Soon they returned, and, with them, Frasco and one other of the Spaniard's crew, named Gil. Both the latter walked with lagging step, and their faces were gloomy.

"*Capitán*," jerked Frasco, "the others are gone." He moved his chin toward the forest.

The Spaniard's face darkened; but he answered as if he had half expected this desertion.

"*Bien*. You two come with us?"

The Maquiritare, whose intelligent face was unusually expressive, seemed to struggle with himself. Gil, more phlegmatic, watched him intently.

"*Capitán!* Do not go on the Periqueta!" broke from Frasco.

"Why?"

"*Muy maluc'!* Very bad!"

"And why?"

"*Diablos!* Devils!"

"Ah! So? Devils of what sort?"

The Indian seemed to writhe again. Then his jaw set and his countenance went blank. Only his brown eyes, dumbly expressive as those of a fine dog, still pleaded with his master not to go.

León laughed lightly, turning his amused gaze to the other Indians. More of these had come out now, and several of them were watching Frasco with eyes narrowed. As the Spaniard studied their ominous looks his smile vanished.

"Go and get your weapons," he crisply directed. "Bring the two men who are to go with us. Let the cassava and other things be carried to a good *curial*. We shall use only one boat. Let nine paddles also be brought. *Vaya!*"

Frasco, following his gaze, swept the faces around him; walked away, and, in so doing, made two of those who seemed unfriendly get out of his path. In his stride was a grim readiness which boded ill for any one obstructing him. Gil followed after, giving no indication of any feeling whatsoever.

"Squall brewing," suggested McKay.

"Brewing, but it will not break," judged León. "There has been some bad disagreement between these two and the rest. Frasco remains faithful, and Gil. The others—perhaps they wish us to go to the devils on the Periqueta, perhaps not. But it is not good for Frasco to warn us of those devils, especially where these others can hear him. I am much surprized that he did so. You remember how dumb he was last night."

Nods answered. At that time León had made it known to all his crew that he was aware of the visit of the blond Indian, and

had demanded an explanation. Not one word had come in answer. Frasco and all his fellows had remained absolutely tongueless, and finally had gone in a body to the *paragua* and remained there.

"Ye ain't got yer men under very good control, Loco," Tim had grumbled then.

To which the rover had countered:

"They are not *my* men, but their own men; free men. They stay with me because they will, and leave me when they will. One cannot drive these people."

The truth of this assertion was even more apparent now than it had been then. Six out of the eight had willed to quit the expedition and were gone; the other two could not be driven, either by León or by their own people; they were staying because they willed to do so.

What talk had passed in the *paragua* during the night the white men could never know, but it evidently had been heated. Now they felt a whole-souled admiration for the loyal Frasco, who not only was forcing himself to enter a region obviously awful to him, but had fought to overcome some powerful inhibition in revealing to his Spanish friend diabolical horrors.

His warning, though outwardly disregarded by the inflexible adventurers, was not without effect. The manner of its delivery—the visible struggle to speak when every instinct commanded silence—made it doubly ominous. Too, it recalled forcibly the two previous warnings: the fragmentary admonition of the dying Curro, trying with his last breath to tell something to the white men who had leaped to rescue him, and the grisly prophecy of the madman who walked by night. And Juancito, with his first flat refusal and his laconic "*Maluc*'," the palpable dread of the Periqueta shown by the other Uaunanans, the desertion of the paddlers who hitherto had flinched from nothing, all these were portents of evil.

Now, unspeaking, Tim reached into his pack, brought forth his heavy ammunition belt and holstered hand gun, and buckled them on; then picked his rifle from the hammock, where it had lain all night beside him, and tested the action. Nobody laughed at him. Instead, McKay and Knowlton in turn produced belts and pistols and donned them. And Portonio and León looked toward their repeaters, then at each other.

The two loyal Maquiritares were gone hardly a minute. Reappearing, they brought with them the guides. All four now were heavily armed; for they bore bows, basket quivers containing numerous long shafts, and machetes. Behind them came all adult males who had not already appeared outside.

Frasco evidently had given succinct commands which Juancito chose to obey, for every one now became busy. Some disappeared down the hill, going to get a nine-man canoe; others gathered up loads of cassava, yams and plantains, which they carried to the creek; still others volunteered to transport the personal goods of the explorers. Whatever might be their reasons, the men of Uaunana were exhibiting marked readiness to speed the departing guests.

IN LESS than half an hour camp was broken and the campers wending their way down through the tree débris. At the top of the hill Juancito stood just as on the previous day: cool, impassive, his eyes on the white men. To him, in departing, each of those whites had given a straight look and a brief *adios*. He had not answered by word or sign. But now, as he saw the last of them turn at the edge of the tree fringe and wave an ironical farewell, into his face came a brooding expression akin to sorrow.

That last man was Tim, and his parting flourish was not to Juancito but to any girl who might, unseen, be looking her last at him. Nor was the chief's misgiving, if he felt any, for Tim or his American partners; rather, it was for the blond Spaniard who had gone with them. To the chief and the people of Uaunana, Loco León had been a friend.

Down the last abrupt declivity the voyagers dropped, and the tribe house and the clearing were blotted out. Once more they were among trees, with water and canoes lying before them and the unknown awaiting them. Into a long dugout they stepped, taking their respective places: The Indians in the bow paddling seats, Portonio at the stern with a shovel-shaped steering blade, the señores amidships, with rifles and paddles laid ready to hand. And without a parting word to the Maquiritares grouped on the shore they slid away down the *caño* and out into the Ventuari.

"Well," said Knowlton, as they cruised

easily down with the current, "we are no longer thirteen, if that indicates anything. Thirteen of us came up, and nine go down. Let's see, isn't nine a sort of mystic number three times three—proof against spells and so on? Anyway, the thirteenth of us didn't meet any horrible fate while we were together. That knocks one of your omens in the head, Tim."

"Mebbe," granted the Celt. "And then again, mebbe an egg got laid while there was thirteen of us that'll hatch out yet for the nine of us."

"Let her hatch," quoth McKay.

León said nothing. He sat watching the two men, who stroked steadily without a word or a look for the Caño Negro pair behind them. For some hours nobody spoke again, save for a curt direction or two in passing a *raudal*.

Then, near noon, at their left yawned the mouth of the Periqueta. So strong had been the push of the current that, with only four paddles swinging in effortless rhythm, the distance which the Americans remembered as a full day's journey had been covered in less than half that time.

At sight of that dreaded water, Frasco and Gil halted their paddles as if paralyzed. The Uaunana men, too, slowed their regular sway, though they did not cease entirely. Portonio, imperturbable, swung the boat into the flow of the new stream. And the three Americans and the Spaniard simultaneously reached for paddles, dipped them overside, and drove their craft southward with determined power.

For a couple of hundred yards they forced their way into the teeth of the current, the Indians turning surprized faces as they felt the sudden surge of strength behind them, picking up the stroke. In that concerted drive, in the set lips and level eyes of their superiors, the aborigines sensed a united, inexorable will, which they could but obey.

The die was cast. The Periqueta was invaded—its waters flung aside, impotent to stem the irresistible rush of the white men. There would be no turning back. All this, and more, was driven into the Maquiritares more forcefully by that initial onslaught than by any words known to men. And they mutely bent their backs once more to the toil of carrying on.

"Now let's land and eat," said McKay. "We've tapped the Periqueta on the nose without a come-back. Don't see any devils making faces along shore, either. Portonio! *Derecha!*"

The steersman turned the prow to the right, as directed. At a wooded spot free from undergrowth they berthed and went ashore. There, undisturbed by any menacing sight or sound, they lunched in leisurely fashion, cool and comfortable in the shade.

"The river of demons," mused León, smiling reflectively as he gazed along the stream. "More than once I have thought to travel this river, but always something arose to turn me elsewhere. And now I am on it at last. I hope the demons have not tired of waiting for me and gone to some other place. I should much like to see one of them."

McKay's eyes twinkled approvingly. His only reply, however, was a question.

"What's your idea, if any, as to the nature of the demons?"

"Only this: I know that all the people of this Guayana believe high mountains to be the homes of demons, because around such mountains sometimes rage terrible storms; and this Periqueta comes from mountains at the south, some of which may be tall and stormy. Yet I never have known the Maquiritares to fear a river because mountains were near it; it is only the mountains themselves which they dread. So——"

He shrugged, hinting at the folly of wasting breath on surmises, and arose. They reentered the canoe, settled themselves for steady work, and pushed out.

"*Vamos con Dios, patrón,*" the Spaniard jestingly voiced the old formula of departing boatmen. "Let us go with God."

"*Y con la Virgen.* And with the Virgin," Portonio smilingly gave back the steersman's requisite response.

"And the —— fly away with the guy that lays down first," contributed Tim. Which conclusion was so contrary to the one prescribed by custom that a chorus of chuckles swept the boat.

So, reckless of powers celestial or infernal, they paddled away; four silent Maquiritares setting the short, rapid stroke; McKay and Knowlton, Tim and León, swaying in unison, the first three with pistols hitched over to hang between their thighs, the fourth with his rifle at his feet; Portonio lounging astern with paddle trailing and gun leaning against gunwale. Around the first curve they crawled, and so

out of sight from the Ventuari; nine men in a boat, paddling up the river of the evil name, who never were to paddle down it.

Beyond they found only a continuation of the same empty water, the same blank jungle shores, the same occasional *raudales*, which had become so familiar on the river they left behind. And for the rest of that day, until sundown approached, they journeyed on without seeing any sign of man.

The first indication that any human being had ever traveled here before them was discovered when, following the directions of the guides, they turned in at the mouth of a little *caño*, hardly more than a brook, and found a good camp site where lay old fish-bones, rain-spattered feathers, and a few long-dead coals. No hut stood there, and it was apparent that the spot was seldom visited.

IN LESS than half an hour a *rancheria* had been created and the hammocks hung. The Indians, still in pairs, went into the forest hunting. Presently they returned heavily laden, the Uaunanans bringing in a *curassow* turkey each, while Frasco and Gil proudly bore a peccary. When darkness settled down the birds had become nothing but bones, while the pig was roasting in sections on a pole griddle over a steady fire.

"Where are your *demonios*, Frasco?" gibed Portonio, glancing into the peaceful night. "Where do they hide from us?"

Frasco, squatting beside the cook-fire, met his mocking eye with somber gaze. Then he moved his head southward.

"Why do you carry so many arrows?" quizzed Knowlton. "Can a demon be slain by them?"

Frasco made no reply. But, after a moment, Gil spoke.

"Guaharibos."

León, listening, lifted his brows.

"Guaharibos?" he echoed. "Guaharibos live here?"

"No. They come. They go."

"And the *demonios* do not harm them?"

No response. The subject of *demonios* was one on which not even Frasco would speak more.

When the Indians sought their hammocks, as they soon did, they showed no sign of expecting attack by man or spirit that night. True, they set their weapons close beside them; but then they curled up and closed their eyes without hesitation. The others followed their example, keeping no watch. And throughout the night reigned unbroken peace.

So it went for six more days and nights. Day after day the dugout forged on, its men spying no others. Night after night it lay at some spot selected by the Uaunana guides, while the paddlers slept the sleep of healthy fatigue. Yet, despite the absence of any visible or audible danger, despite the gibes and jeers voiced nightly, among the voyagers a growing tenseness made itself felt. It emanated, perhaps, from the Maquiritares; but every man in the party sensed it: A feeling that, blank though the jungle seemed to be, it had eyes, and that it was constantly watching—and waiting.

Now and then, as the shores crept past, an unexplainable movement of a bush caught their roving gaze: A clump of plantain dipping as if smitten by a breeze, when no breeze blew; a long fern bowing suddenly and remaining in that position; palm fronds quivering for no reason. And when they went ashore, near at hand sounded faint rustlings which seemed too stealthy to be made by hastily retreating animals or birds.

Indeed, after that first day there was a dearth of wild life in the vicinity of the camps. The Maquiritares found little meat. It was noticeable, too, that now they hunted together instead of in pairs, as if whatever division had previously existed were obliterated by the need of a united front against some lurking peril. Still no actual, definite menace could be discerned by day or by dark. And when night closed down the mysterious movement round about them ceased, to be heard no more until morning.

Yet there remained always that sensation of being watched, even in the night. And, though they kept no counter-watch, feeling that night vigils would be useless, they slept ready for sudden action. Every weapon was within instant reach. The Americans, in fact, slept with pistols still belted on, where they could be seized without groping.

No fire was allowed to burn after dark. Nightly the sky became obscured by heavy clouds; and when the gloom thickened under trees and roof the camp became invisible. Only the prescience of unhuman creatures, it seemed, could locate the hut and its occupants amid the moonless murk.

It was the seventh night when the demons struck.

The journeying that day had been hard, because of *raudales;* and on making camp—beside a noisy brook and below another brawling rapid—all had gone early to their hammocks. No sound but the steady rush of the waters came to their ears, and all were soon asleep. Hours fled. Then, of a sudden, McKay found himself sitting up in his hammock, pistol ready in his right fist.

Darkness lay heavy around him. In it his dilated pupils made out only the vague forms of the nearest hammocks. Then behind him sounded a low, tense demand:

"Who moves?"

It was the voice of León. With it blended the click of a rifle hammer.

"McKay. What's wrong?"

"I do not know. Something."

For minutes they listened. Only a quiet snore from the net of Portonio came to them. They arose; moved slowly about, peering into the gloom; found nothing. Suddenly León voiced a startled exclamation.

"*Los Indios!* They are gone!"

Heedless of possible danger, he struck a match. Its brief light showed that he spoke truth. Not one of the Maquiritares remained. Their hammocks were there. So were their bows and arrows—even their machetes, standing upright from the ground beside the hanging beds. But the men had vanished as if seized and swallowed by some gigantic ogre.

León whirled, stepped to the slanting stone beside which the dugout had been moored, and struck another match. As he dropped its charred stub and darkness swooped over him again, the tumbling waters beyond seemed to roar with malicious mirth.

The canoe, too, had disappeared.

CHAPTER XIV

THE DART

"WHAT'S doin', Cap?"

The guarded voice came from Tim's hammock. In the gloom McKay made out three shapes which had silently risen in their nets and now sat rigid and ready. The camp was wide awake.

"We're marooned again. Boat and Indians gone. All the guns here?"

Affirmative grunts answered, followed by Tim's sour growl:

"Made a sneak, hey? The low-down, yeller quitters——"

"I would not say that, Señor Tim," interrupted León, a touch of asperity in his tone. "Men who mean to desert do not go unarmed. All their weapons are here. Neither would those boys try to pass through the *raudales* below here at night. It would be death to attempt it."

A silence ensued. Eyes vainly searched the density; ears strained for some suspicious noise. After a time Knowlton queried—

"Any blood in the hammocks?"

León moved to the untenanted nets, but struck no more lights. Instead, he passed a hand slowly along each one, his fingers seeking wet spots.

"None."

From that time until daybreak only two words were voiced. McKay, after peering at his phosphorescent watch-dial, announced: "One-forty." After a period of tense alertness, all slowly relaxed in their hammocks, rifles held loosely across their bodies; but not an eye closed.

As they hung there, every mind reviewed the last known words and movements of the Maquiritares, probing for some indication that they might have planned a desertion here. There was none. The Uaunana men had said that the *raudal* above was long and hard, and that there would not be time to traverse it before night. So the halt had been made at this spot, which, though a natural site for a camp, showed no sign of previous use. The Indians had made no attempt to hunt; they had caught a few small pompano fish, and, with these and the inevitable cassava, had made their meal while the señores opened the last of their cans.

Thereafter their behavior had been in no way different from that of the previous evening: They had repeatedly eyed the surroundings, showing some signs of the nervousness which seemed habitual of late, but none of incipient panic; they had carefully set their weapons close by the hammocks, and then had turned in. No, there had been no evidence of any intent to quit. Nor was there reason, even now, to accuse them of doing so.

To suppose that they would abandon arms and beds and fare down the reef-torn river in blackness, this was well-nigh preposterous. Even if driven by insane terror,

it was hardly conceivable that, in springing from sleep, they would have failed to snatch up machetes—arrows—something with which to defend themselves. Still less was it imaginable that, if they did make a frenzied exodus, it would be so noiseless as to leave the white men undisturbed.

Nor, for that matter, was it at all likely that anything which could rouse them and drive them thence would not wake every one in camp. And neither McKay nor León could recall the slightest disturbance. Neither of them knew why he had started from sleep, every nerve alert to some dire thing to which he could not put a name.

So they waited in silence, half expecting a recurrence of the uncanny visitation which had obliterated four men; half hoping that they might delude the marauding Thing—whatever it was—into believing them once more asleep; yet feeling that their vigil was futile; that the Thing knew they lay in wait for it.

Within their meager range of vision nothing moved. To their straining ears came only the continued mockery of the unseen rapid. This, as the hours dragged on, became more hideous than the crazy jeers which had chilled their blood at Monoblanco. Its ghastly gurgles, its low chuckles, its hissing undertone, made it seem a fiend chortling there in the dark. The voice of Black White, although that of a madman, had still been human. This was insensate, monstrous—the slavering snarl of the demon-haunted Periqueta, torturing the invaders who had dared crawl into its maw and at last had heard its teeth snap behind them.

Listening against their will to that malignant exultation, the adventurers considered their own situation, present and future. They now must be within a day and a half of the head of the winding stream; for the stated length of the river was eight days' journey, and they had traveled on it for six full days and one afternoon.

To go back down it in a canoe would hardly take more than three. But there was no canoe, here or anywhere along the course which they had traveled—unless their own boat, maliciously loosed to drift to ruin, was caught among *raudales* below. Even if it could be found there, virtually all of their equipment was lost; for they had taken from the dugout only the articles they desired for use in camp over night, and everything else would be thrown overboard when the masterless craft capsized in the writhing waters on the reefs. And the boat itself was irrevocably gone, they felt. Since no other was available, and since any raft which they might build would be broken up in the rapids, the way out was closed. Well might the river gloat now over its trapped prey!

BUT to this question—the problem of getting out again—they gave but little thought. Time enough to worry over that when they were ready to go. Now, after rapidly running over these points, their minds reached ahead; on into the mysterious land of the *blancos*, toward which they had turned their faces and to which they were not disposed to turn their backs. That land must be near.

Twenty days' journey from Caño Negro it lay, if the Tamara men had spoken truly; and the expedition now had traveled for seventeen days, excluding both the stops at Monoblanco and Uaunana and the time consumed in detouring to the latter place. Thus they must be on the border of that land. And they would go on.

Were those *blancos*, perhaps, responsible for the disappearance of the four Indian members of this party? Was this region, by some occult decree, forbidden to Indians, however light of skin, but open to real white men? Knowlton nearly voiced an exclamation as this thought struck him. All the white men here had been unmolested by the Thing which had snatched the Maquiritares from their hammocks. Yet how could human beings have entered this hut and killed or captured and borne away four strong Maquiritares without struggle or noise? It was unthinkable.

So, too, was the surmise that it could have been done by those Guaharibos of whose possible presence Frasco had given a hint. In fact, this hypothesis was even more untenable than the other; for the Guaharibos were lethal savages with a centuries-old hatred for white men. Only last night León had talked about them, and the main facts concerning them were fresh in all minds.

Their homeland was more than a hundred miles to the south, at the sources of the Orinoco. During the dry season, however, they roved for great distances, marauding, killing, looting, forever on the move. More than once they had come to the Alto

Ventuari region on raids. They were utter barbarians, at odds with all other Indians, and intensely ferocious toward men of white or part-white ancestry. Had they come upon this camp, they would have bent every energy toward exterminating its white occupants first.

Thus all the mental groping of the vigilant five got them nowhere. They could only lie and listen, meanwhile wrestling vainly with the mystery, until something new should come about or dawn should bring light. Portonio, probably, had the easiest time of all; for he was one who took things as they came and devoted little mental effort to whys and wherefores.

The *curial* and the Indios were gone; he and the rest were here; they had good guns; the hammock was comfortable, even though one did not sleep; tomorrow the señores would decide on something; then he would do what they did. So why need a man fight his head? He did not. He lay tranquil, though alert, and let the things of *mañana* shape themselves as they might.

Rain came, battered the leaf roof for an hour, and passed on. The sky cleared, but the hour was past moonset, and no light dissolved the misty blanket enshrouding the camp. At last, however, dawned the new day.

At the first thinning of the shadows up rose the five, sweeping everything about them with piercing gaze. Then, as the light strengthened, they scanned closely everything in the hut. Inch by inch they surveyed the ground, seeking the smallest sign of flight or struggle, the tiniest spot of red—even though reason reiterated that no commotion could have passed unheard.

They found nothing such as they sought. There stood the machetes, ready for instant seizure by the hands of the vanished four. There lay a few small fragments of cassava, dropped by some one of the Indians who had munched a piece while sitting in his hammock. Otherwise the earth beside and beneath those empty beds showed no vestige. The white cotton hammocks were unspotted. Above them, suspended from a cross-pole, hung the bows and quivers of arrows.

Unspeaking, they moved to the rain-wet rock where the canoe had last lain. It bore no traces. A steady look down the river showed it to be empty. The long boat had disappeared as completely as had its owners. A glance in the other direction, into the grinning *raudal*, served only to emphasize the folly of looking there. No power could move the ponderous dugout up through that death-trap in the night.

"It looks, friend Tim, as if your blessing down below had come true in a way you did not mean," said León, with a tight smile, "and the —— had flown away with some of us."

"You said somethin', feller," morosely agreed Tim. "And the boat's *spurlos versenkt*, as the Heinies used to say: Sunk without a trace. Lookit here. We tied her to this here tree. Ain't even a piece o' rope left."

True enough, there was not so much as a wisp of the piassava fibre. A close examination of the bark revealed only a rubbed spot where the painter had chafed. There was no knife-scratch or other mark.

McKay turned away, his gray gaze again plumbing the depths of the surrounding woods.

"Any coffee left?" he calmly asked. "Portonio, *hay café?*"

"*Pocito.* A little," responded the erstwhile pilot.

With alacrity he returned to the interior and kindled a fire. The others, hollow-eyed from their useless vigil, moved after him and waited hungrily, all at once aware that their nerves demanded the usual hot stimulant. When it was ready they drank with avidity.

"It is the last," added Portonio, expressively up-ending the small can wherein the daily supply had been habitually kept. Nobody answered orally; but simultaneous scowls spoke volumes.

"Are we out o' smokes, too?" croaked Tim, after a vain search of pockets.

"I've got a full pouch of cube-cut," assured McKay. Knowlton and León, too, had tobacco of different grades; a fragrant, golden American mixture, and an ink-black Brazilian cigaret-brand of terrific strength. The red man's lugubrious face brightened again.

"Wal, we ain't so bad off, then," he rejoiced. "Gimme the makin's, Looey. Tobaccer and bullets, we've got—good thing we've been bringin' our belts ashore every night—but that's about all. No grub, after this breakfast. No boat. No nothin', but guns and knives and what we stand in and sleep in. But we can go quite a ways with

them. Where do we go from here, Cap?"

McKay's eyes met those of León. Of late the Spaniard had, by virtue of his position as comrade and guide, been practically in command of the party. Now he knew little, if anything, more about their environment than did the rest. It was essential that some one act as head of the expedition; the tall Scot had been that head until León began to pilot it; and the leadership now was tacitly reverting to him. The blue-eyed Venezuelan grasped the situation evoked by Tim's careless question, and those blue eyes smiled into the gray ones. The two understood each other.

"Every man has his own say," was McKay's tactful reply. "But if you put it up to me, I'll say: First, take a look at the *raudal* below here and see if the *curial* or anything else is caught there; then, whether it is or not, carry on. We've all got legs."

"Attaboy!" approved Tim. "Me, I want to git to the bottom o' this funny business that's goin' on round here."

Vigorous nods by both Knowlton and León expressed their full agreement with this sentiment. Breakfast, comprising whatever scraps remained from the night meal, was eaten. Then said McKay:

"I'll go to the *raudal*. If anything's there I'll yell. The rest of you snoop around and see if you can find any sign. Stick together."

"You're not going alone, Rod!" disputed Knowlton.

"I am. I want you fellows to scout around camp. Anything that wanted to get me, or all of us, could have done it in the night. Any —— that tries flying away with me in daylight will have his hands full. No argument, Merry!"

HE PICKED up his rifle and a machete and turned down-stream. But he was not to go alone, in spite of his decision; for Portonio, without a word, grasped his own gun and bush-knife, caught up with him in two strides, elbowed him aside, and took the lead. McKay growled; then grinned, and let the determined fellow have his way. The Venezuelan's deft sweep of the long blade evinced a dexterity such as the Northerner did not possess, and the trip could obviously be made in much less time by his path-making skill.

Across the brook they passed, and on through the bush, now lighted up by the fast-rising sun. In the morning breeze the foliage around and above them rustled like a long sigh, and from it fell a miniature shower of drops remaining from the bygone rain. Yet, despite that night deluge and the present wetness of the forest, the ground felt firm, not muddy. Subconsciously the pair noticed this, and Portonio formed a conclusion which he was soon to voice. At present, however, he was too busy with his steel and his watchfulness of the forest to propound any theories. Steadily they kept on, finding no danger, until they reached the next *raudal*.

That reef, hidden from the camp by a turn of the stream, was perhaps a third of a mile below it. It was short, but full of rocks, and unlikely to allow an unmanned boat to pass through. Yet it held no dugout in its clutch. Nor was any unnatural object lodged on its stones. The rocks were bare. And the short river vista below it was empty.

After one survey which missed nothing, they turned back. They were half way to camp when Portonio, studying the ground more closely now, spoke.

"*Capitán*. I think we are near open country. This ground is hard. It is like that of *sabana*. And an Indian on the Alto Orinoco once told me there are high *sabanas* and mountains here."

"*Bueno*. We shall see."

They pressed on a little faster. Recrossing the brook, they found the hut vacant; but a rod or two behind it the blue shirt of León was vaguely visible amid the greenery, and as they spied him he turned, as if sensing their presence. He beckoned. As they walked to him they mentally braced themselves for some grisly sight—the bodies of the Indians, perhaps, fearfully mangled.

Instead, they found their comrades clustered beside a small tree on which was affixed a cryptic object. It was at once an enigma and, at first sight, a menace; a silent messenger of jungle death: A blow-gun dart.

It was not, however, a spent missile caught by its point and lost or forgotten by hunter or prowler. It had been deliberately and carefully placed; bound to the trunk by a slanting ligature of vine—fresh vine. And it was such a dart as no man here—all of whom had some familiarity with such sinister weapons—had ever before seen. In size and shape, to be sure, it was typical: A

miniature javelin, a foot and a half long, a sixteenth of an inch thick, needle-sharp at the point, wrapped with a short conical plug of cotton near the butt. But it was dyed. From tip to midsection it was jet black; from there to the dull end, blood red.

"A token and a guide," said León.

"Token of what?" puzzled McKay. "Death?"

"I do not know. But I do not think it is a threat. See, it points away from our camp, not toward it. What the colors mean I can not say, though I know what made them. The black is *curame*—not curare, the poison, but *curame*, which the Indians use as black paint; and the red is the *onorte*, or *annatto*. It has been left here for us to find. As you see, the *camborita*, the vine cord, is fresh. And the dart points——"

"Points to a path!" broke in Tim, impatient of the explanation of what he had already learned. "Cap, it's a traffic sign. Loco squinted along it, and we went straight ahead, and there's a path. It ain't much, but it's somethin' to walk on. It heads west. Ye didn't find nothin' down below?"

"Not a thing. Portonio thinks there's savanna country near by. Probably it's a little to the west. And you say that path runs west? Good! Let's go!"

TO BE CONTINUED

SAVING HIS BACON

by Nevil Henshaw

IT WAS at the Little Hammock, one of those patches of sand and marsh grass that dot the waters of the Louisiana coast. The party of fishermen that had come down from the mainland for a week's sport, found the small island tenanted by a Cajun trapper. With him was his numerous family and his live stock consisting of two chickens and a pig.

The mosquitoes were bad, what they call "hot" in that country. So the fishermen suffered accordingly. Sheltered by their mosquito bars, they fought the tiny pests through the long hot nights as best they could.

The trapper was not so fortunate. He and his brood slept out *au naturel*. Yet, save for one exception, none of them seemed any the worse for it.

This exception was a baby of a few months old. Soft of skin and wholly defenseless, the small creature was one solid pepper of bites. Throughout the night it wailed in feeble protest.

Badly bitten himself and feeling true sympathy for this unfortunate atom, one of the fishermen searched his boat until he finally unearthed an extra mosquito bar. This he gave to the trapper with careful instructions as to its use.

"Put it over that baby," he ordered. "See that it is covered right. If you don't the mosquitoes will eat it alive."

This the trapper promised gratefully to do. Yet all that night the baby wailed as usual. Puzzled and curious, the fisherman sought an explanation.

"See here," he demanded. "What was the matter with that baby last night? Did you cover him up as I told you?"

The trapper spread out his hands.

"Ah, that *bébé*," said he. "He don't have need for that bar. He is all bit up like you see. Those moskeets, they don't hurt him no more. But my pig, he is new to the marsh. He has a bad time. So me, I just put that bar over those pig."

THE THICK PLOTTENS

by David Thibault

Author of "The Long-Headed Sapsucker," etc.

ON A RAW Saturday morning in March "Professor Willhite" laid this plan before "Cats" Evans, the plantation blacksmith, with whom he stayed during the six months' open season on pickaninnies. The conference took place in Evans' house, and neither Mr. Patterson nor the school board knew that the plotters were enjoying a hard coal fire at the expense of the smithy forge and the school heater.

"It won't be *stealin'* exactly, 'cause we won't be doin' it for the coal," began the eminent educator tactfully.

"Dat's a fack—dat's sho'ly de truf," agreed Cats, wielding the poker expertly with the raking-up passes of a blacksmith. "Dog my cats, 'Fessor, ef I don't b'lieve dat long black line in de air ain't gwine to beat our time."

"Virgy? No sir, he ain't! Here's the idea: If Virgy gets caught stealin' Mr. Patterson's coal he'll lose his job——"

"An' most of his skin, too, sho' as you're bawn. I knows Mr. Patterson."

"Well, we won't grieve 'bout that, Brother Evans. Now if he loses his job as yard boy, and maybe has to go to the pen, you know mighty well Mary won't have anything to do with him."

"I knows dat—I knows dat. We is all black folks together; but Mary is sho' a choosin' kind of gal. But how we gwine to manage? Mr. Patterson he set a lot of store by dat long boy."

"We'll take enough out of Mr. Patterson's coal house to make a showin'. Then 'fore he notices it we'll go to him and complain that somebody's stealin' coal from the school house and the blacksmith shop. Mr. Patterson he'll go look in his own coal house and miss what we've taken. Then he won't rest till he catches the thief. You can get Virgy down here some night, and keep him till I go and put a sack of coal on his porch. Then I'll go turn in the 'larm and tell Mr. Patterson I just saw a man steal a sack of coal from the school house and head toward the quarters. You follow me, Brother Evans?

"I does. Dog my cats, ef you ain't thinkin' like a snake lickin' out his tongue—fast, and twict at once. But how is I to keep Virgy here, an' it night? Dat boy's scareder of me dan a crawfish is of a bullfrog 'cause I knows hoodoo tricks."

"Well, Brother Evans, that's your lookout. I'm goin' to do the ticklish part—maybe risk gettin' shot."

"It'll be like splittin' dry black gum wid a dull hatchet, but dog my cats! I'll keep him here."

"All right. Then s'pose we walk up and call on Miss Williams?"

Together they footed it along the dusty plantation road. The smith was burly, frog-eyed, shelf-lipped, and as black and aggressive as the crows that flapped overhead in the clean spring air; he had a good deal of crow-impudence and crow-wisdom, too. 'Fessor was the color of well made ginger bread, low and small of stature,

long-faced and little-eyed. Obviously nothing but the imperative urge of mutual fear could have allied these two. Each figured deep in his medulla oblongata that after Virgy's hash was settled would be time enough for dissolution of partnership and further ructions.

To their disgust, Virgy—a youth counted tall among tall men, tall among lesser shrubs, youngish trees, medium buildings and middle-height telegraph poles—was hanging a clothes line for Mary as the twain came in earshot.

"You is handy at dat kind of work, Mr. Virgy. You is so large," simpered Mary.

She had been Patterson's cook for six years, and who married her would be a made man.

"I is," grinned Virgy; "'tain't no trouble to me."

"Dem white men dat fixed de 'lectric wires round de house had to have a ladder; 't wa'n't no higher to reach dan you jes reached for me neither."

"Yessum. I'd reach 'most anywheres for you, Mary."

"Go 'long! When you means what you says I might listen."

"Means it, Mary. Sho' does."

"Hush man, hush! Who dat comin'?"

"It looks like a bullfrog an' a bessy-bug, but I ain't callin' no names."

"Dog my cats! What you done painted your flag pole black for, Mary?" demanded the masterful smith, running an unloving eye from Virgy's feet to his battered green cap. "'Tain't no flag pole, though, 'cause it ain't got nothin' 'pon top. Must be dat Virgy."

Mary tittered, and a breathy growl rumbled and wheezed from the thin chest of the stung youth. Willhite smirked and removed his brown derby.

"How is Miss Williams this morning?"

"I don't know. My name's Mary."

"I believe that it's proper to call an unmarried lady who has no older sister——"

"Call 'em what you wants to. My name's Mary."

"But Webster's Unabridged Dictionary ——"

"Under de bridge or *over* de bridge, my name's Mary!"

"De lawd got a use for everything He made," Cats told Virgy confidentially, "but ain't nobody found out what you is good for yet. You might make a can'le if you could be lit, but 'tai'n't no shelf far enough from de ceilin' to set you on. Dog my cats!"

"What is you?" began Virgy; but the nimble-witted smith allowed no time for defense.

"*You's* a straight streak of lightnin' froze stiff an' painted black. If God hadn't 'a' had mercy an' bent a yard of your legs on to de groun' for foots, you couldn't inhabit de yarth."

"Huh! You barks, but likely you won't bite nothin—'ceptin' bread. Who is you anyway?" Virgy knew there would be no fighting in Mr. Patterson's back yard.

"Not much—I ain't much, Virgy; but I'll say dis much for myself: Ol' Cats was makin' a honest livin' poundin' i'on on de anvil when you wuz jes' a little baby only twelve foot high."

Mary and Willhite joined Evans in a guffaw of uncharitable laughter. Virgy growled incoherently and began to leave.

"Say dis much, Mary," he finally got out; "says did much: If it stahts to rain, jes back under Cats' lip."

"VIRGY," said Mr. Patterson a week after the clash of the rivals, "keep your eye on our coal house. That school teacher Hitwill, or Willy Hite, or whatever his name is, and old Cats, say somebody is stealing coal from the school house and the shop. Some of ours is missing, too. Somebody's going to get full of shot."

Wheezing, the big planter passed on. Mr. Patterson was elephantine, red, restless, abusive. His fat sizzled into constant action under the undying fire of superabundant energy. Choleric he was, and despotic; but he was just—even to the uttermost meaning of that noblest of words. Virgy watched the broad departing back.

"Somebody sho' gwine to git hurt; boss'll stand 'most anything 'cept layin 'round and stealin'."

He fell to hoeing early potatoes again, his lithe and lengthy back humped into the loop characteristic of measuring worms in action. A squat shadow fell on his hoe handle.

"Hoe 'em out, long boy, hoe 'em out! Good mornin'—how is you?"

"'Mornin', Cats. I's so-so."

The smith had been wonderfully friendly of late, and Virgy, always good-natured,

credulous and easily flattered, had responded whole-heartedly.

"Is de bugs stahted eatin' 'em yet?" inquired Evans, eying the thriving young plants.

"Naw. Mr. Patterson he make me spray 'em if dey do staht. Hates it, too, 'cause dat spray stuff is p'ison."

"Sprayin's all right for dem dat don't know no better way. But dog my cats! All dem spray mixtures is p'ison, ain't dey, long boy?"

"Sho'. Dat what kills de bugs. Dey eats it, an' it p'ison."

"Dat p'ison apt to hurt you bad, long boy."

"Boss say——"

"Sho' he do! Say it won't hurt you none. What he care for a nigger or two less, so's he kill de 'tater bugs? Now I knows a charm again' 'tater bugs dat ain't p'ison to nothin' *but* 'tater bugs."

"Mr. Patterson he charm 'em wid Pa's green and ars'nate of lead."

"Dem's bof p'ison as a grave yard rattlesnake, an' you knows it."

"Sho' is. What is I to do? He won't fool wid no charm, and he won't let me."

"Dog my cats, Virgy, you don't think none, boy! *You* git de charm and work it unbeknownst to him, and dey won't never be no 'tater bugs for him to p'ison."

"Dat's so. What it like?"

"You come to my house—say Thursday night after supper—an' I'll show you."

"All right. I'll sho' come. Pesterin' wid p'ison I *sho*' don't like."

Genuinely scared, but mightily curious, Virgy knocked at the blacksmith's door on the evening appointed. Cats opened to him.

"Come in, Virgy—come in! 'Fessor Willhite done gone to town tonight. Nobody but me here."

The interior of the twelve-by-sixteen cabin was made dimly visible by one pot-bellied glass lamp, the sooty chimney of which exercised severest censorship upon all out-going rays of light. Virgy, whose own comfortable quarters were lighted with electricity from the Patterson's plant, blinked uneasily about him. His waning nerve evaporated at sight of a horse's skull on the table, besides a glass of water, the leg bones of several animals and a black human hand—a very life-like, life-size black hand, not unlike Cats' own square-fingered paw. Upon entering he was very sorry he had come; before sitting down he would have been very glad to have gone.

"Where at dat charm, Cats?"

"By an' by I gives it to you, long boy First I shows you de signs an' wonders such as I ain't never showed 'em to nobody befo'."

Cats' one object was to hold his visitor there for as many hours as possible while the crafty Willhite worked his works. Virgy was known to go to bed with the chickens, and was not in any sense a "rambling nigger;" his absence would be noted to his undoing.

Now in full daylight nothing could have pleased and flattered the boy more than to see the hoodoo blacksmith go through his weird paces; but at night—well, a man's nerves get different somehow after sundown.

"Cats, I's *'bleeged* to go soon as I can. Boss he wanted me to watch dat coal house, an' I's gittin' sleepy anyhow."

"Dog my cats, it ain't eight o'clock yet. Boy, I's gwine to show you de deep mysteries, an' all de cur'osities."

"But, Cats——"

"Watch me, boy!"

The blacksmith gathered a lock of his wool on each side of his forehead into a little roll and bound it tightly with black thread. The illusion of diabolic horns was terrifying.

"Water I turns into ink, and ink back into water!"

He threw a grimy red bandanna over the glass of water on the table, fumbled and mumbled, lifted the handkerchief, and sure enough, Virgy's bulging eyes beheld a glass of ink. If Cats had, under screenage of the handkerchief, inserted a cylindrical piece of black paper into the glass, Virgy didn't know it. Again the bandanna, the passes, the muttered charms—the glass now held water. Virgy had seen enough.

"Cats, I's gwine—I got to."

"You is *got* to stay now. I done put de spell on you, and you is 'bleeged to."

Virgy's knees trembled as he rose from the chair.

"Maybe you is, Cats," he moaned, "but I is gwine to leave out away from heah;" and the long boy reached for his hat.

When a white man reaches for his hat, it is a sign; but when a colored boy reaches for his, it's a symbol. Cats knew that

only the tick of seconds intervened between the presence of Virgy and his radio-active absence. He knew too, that Willhite could not possibly have completed his preparations. The buck could not be passed. It was up to Cats to keep Virgy there against a cosmic urge in the soles of Virgy's feet to go elsewhere rapidly. The strain cracked Cats' judgment right half in two, and Cats used the wrong half, he tried to scare Virgy into staying.

"See dis han', long boy?" It had been cut out of boiler plate during slack moments at the shop, from a chalk tracing of the smith's own square right hand. "See dis han'? When I says to it, 'Steel han', choke a nigger!' it'll rise right up an' take d'rection in de air and *find* him. When I says, 'Steel han', slap a nigger!' he's as good as a slapped nigger."

Cats brought his powerful fist down on the table with the swing he employed in sharpening plow points on his three-hundred-pound bicorn anvil. The mystic paraphernalia on the table jumped at the impact, and the steel hand slid to the floor —toward Virgy!

There was a rushing sound and a soughing of the startled night air as it closed a long crack in itself. The desperate Cats sprang in utterly useless pursuit.

"Steel han', choke a nigger!" he yelled through the velvet dark, and, scared stiff at realizing what might happen to the cherished conspiracy, he panted on through the shoe-mouth-deep dust of the plantation road.

Yards and frantically gained yards ahead, Virgy yearned toward Mr. Patterson and the electric lights. Only to reach home! Only to be cussed for a scared fool nigger by that rough, rubicund rock of actuality in the Stygian desert waste of ghoul-invoking night shadows!

Far beneath him his flying feet occasionally spurned a semi-solid substance that flowed swiftly in the opposite direction—the surface of the earth. Faint through the roar of displaced atmosphere came a horrid shout—a graveyard whisper amid the trailing wrecks of broken speed records—

"Steel han,' choke a nigger!"

Virgy tried to die, but his legs wouldn't let him. He sought to compromise on fainting, but met the same determined jack-rabbit interference. A rectangular shadow loomed before—the big barn! A smaller shadow—Mary's cabin! A sun-burst of blessed golden light—Mr. Patterson's back-porch light!

And then, with light and life and hope beneath his very nose, it happened! In full leap he felt the sharp, incisive fingers of the steel hand close on his Adam's apple, his head went back with a snap, and amid the crash of falling worlds, Virgy gave up the ghost.

HE REGAINED consciousness without determining right off into which of the two Great Departments of the Hereafter he had landed. He had never been in a room so clean, so pretty and white, as the one in which he lay. That was all right, and smacked of harps and crowns. But the moment he tried to move, all bets were off. He couldn't conceive of an angel having a head, neck, back, arms, legs, and two hams all broken at once, and his were.

A youngish white man, bald-headed beyond his age, and dressed in a white duck suit, silently opened the door and entered, followed by—lawdy have mercy!—Mr. Patterson and Mary! It might pay to sham sleep. If it were a dream that would help hold it; if it wasn't a dream he would get more information that way.

"Make him live, Doc," came in the rough, kindly tones that were tonic to the black boy's soul. "There ain't many like him any more. I always liked that boy, but he didn't really show up till last night. You patch him up so I can do something for him."

"There's no real danger, Mr. Patterson. Nothing broken inside or out, as far as we can tell, except that little cut on the front of the throat. But he certainly had the dickens of a shake up. Was it dynamite, or did he fall off that big barn you've got out there?"

"Fall off? Didn't you hear what happened?"

"No, sir."

"Man, listen: We been missing coal out our way. Nigger blacksmith and school teacher mentioned it to me, and I told this boy to watch our coal house. Well, the way those two —— rascals told the tale, suspicion kinda pointed toward Virgy. I ran a wire out from my electric-light plant to the coal-house door and fixed a bell by my

bed—see?—so if the door was opened I'd know it. Well, sir, last night they came ——"

"They?"

"Yeah—it was the teacher and the blacksmith—and they got in the coal house through a danged little window I'd plumb forgotten about."

Virgy's heart sang among his ribs; Cats hadn't caught him, but the smith had arrived in time. Mr. Patterson soon confirmed this beatific theory.

"They filled a sack with coal and were making their good getaway when Virgy saw 'em."

"And gave chase?"

"I'll say he did! Two or three chases. Listen: There's a heavy wire clothes line fastened to the corner post of the coal house. It hangs a foot or two above a tall man's head, but it hit this boy on the Adam's apple—see?—and he had up so much steam that it tore the corner post, corner, front, and door out of the coal house, and that rang my alarm. I got out just in time to see this Willhite and old Cats fadin' down the lane. Of course the light was poor, but I had six loads of number eight shot in my pump gun."

"Jimminy! Reckon you hit 'em?"

"I do. There's no school today, and the blacksmith shop is closed for the first time in ten years." Mr. Patterson looked highly satisfied. "You get this boy well, Doc. He gets double wages out of me from now on. And let this girl visit round with him—it's our cook, she knows him."

The big planter left, in low-toned conversation with the white-clad physician.

Mary bent in sweet solicitude over her prostrate hero. Finding nothing else to do, she waved her hand rhythmically before his closed eyes, to keep off imaginary flies and mosquitoes. Without preface Virgy "came to." Mary was not startled.

"I thought your eyes wa's'nt shet so overly tight whilst we was talkin'," she commented complacently.

Virgy came instantly and pointedly to the point.

"Is you stuck on dat gingerbread colored schoolteachin' derby-hatted nigger man, Mary?"

"Willhite? Umph! Not none, Virgy. Ain't no good never come outen a nigger what spends his time goin' round tryin' to talk dictionary."

"Is you stuck on dat blacksmif, Cats, Mary?"

"Who, Cats? Not *none*, Virgy. I was scared of him, dat's all. I ain't gwine to marry no man what has to speak words 'fore you can tell him from a bullfrog."

"Ain't it me, Honey?"

"It is, babe." Mary bent over the pillow expectantly. A moment later the horrified intern shot into the room with rubber-soled velocity.

"Oh!" he said sheepishly, his face relaxing "I thought somebody slammed a door."

THE BARGAIN

by Clyde W. Hough

Author of "A Partner for Gogo," "One of Life's Guardians," etc.

RALSTON had no faith in the rumor that a lone white man was mining gold in the country of the Ilongot Tribe. It was unbelievable. The Ilongots were a bad lot. They were pagan nomads, inhabiting a vast wild region on the eastern slopes of the Cordilleras Centrales in Northern Luzon.

At this time, six years after the close of the Philippine insurrection, these people still were as wild and savage as they had ever been. Among them it was an honor to take the head of an enemy; and every one outside of their own tribe was an enemy.

How, then, was a lone white man managing to mine gold among this tribe and at the same time keep his head on his shoulders? The mere idea was so improbable that it had hardly seemed worth investigating.

However, Ralston was, himself, a seeker after the yellow metal and he certainly meant to get his share if there was any to be had, no matter what the danger might be. Therefore he had come to Dupax, a small town on the edge of Ilongot territory, and had sent Bubano, his Negrito *cargador*—bearer—to run down this very unlikely rumor.

Thus it was that Ralston sat in the one-room bamboo shack that had been his quarters for the past week and ate his breakfast of bacon, hardtack and coffee and waited with considerable uneasiness. He was waiting for Bubano who had not yet returned from the Ilongot country.

And now, according to the time they had both estimated that the errand would take, the *cargador* was a day and a night overdue. Knowing the Ilongots as he did, Ralston had cause a-plenty to worry.

He was beginning to regret that he had sent Bubano. He should have gone himself. This and half a dozen other disturbing thoughts began harassing his mind. What made the Ilongots so bull-headed about sticking to their savage ways?

They must have taken Bubano's head, else he would have been back by now. Why did they so stubbornly resist civilization? All the other head-hunting tribes had foresworn head-hunting and, by this time, most of the younger generation was attending Government schools.

But not so the Ilongots. They still rebuffed all friendly overtures made by Government officials. And force, naturally, would not achieve the end desired. Moreover it was impossible to go among them and set an example. They built only temporary huts and grew practically nothing except a few yams and a very little rice.

If white men or Christian natives went among them—guarded by a constabulary of course—to teach or to preach, the Ilongots simply gathered their women and children together and moved on, leaving their miserable huts and paltry crops without apparent regret. The Negritos were the only human beings with whom they would have any relations whatever. It was for this last reason that Ralston had sent

Bubano, a Negrito, to investigate the gold rumor.

Ralston finished his breakfast, pushed back his chair and stood up—six feet up. He had long and powerful arms, long and heavy legs. He was a big man but didn't look it, at least not when sitting down. The deception was in his shoulders. They were no wider than his waist from flank to flank. But his chest, though narrow, was abnormally deep and the combined muscle behind his shoulder blades made them stand out like a hump. And a great welt of a scar crossed the back of his neck just where neck and skull joined.

He had been prospecting in the northern mountains for nearly six years, since leaving the army when the last fighting in the islands had ended. He had panned gold on streams never before seen by a white man. He had sampled and worked veins in dry lava never before disturbed since volcanic eruption raised it from the bowels of the earth.

Once a hard earned stake had been stolen from him by a trusted partner and on two other occasions he had made strikes that ran four figures when converted into dollars. But there had been long stretches of poor luck in between and now he was still seeking the one big strike that would make him a rich man.

He lighted a cigaret and began pacing the rickety strips of bamboo that formed the floor of his shack. Before many minutes had passed the door creaked on its fiber-thong hinges and then swung violently open. Bubano entered the room and hurried toward the table in the center.

His heavy-muscled bow legs and his stocky brown body were naked. His sole attire was a scant breech-clout. In one hand he carried something that was knotted up in a calico sweat-rag. It made a bundle about the size of a man's fist. Bubano tossed his bundle on the table and said just one word—

"*Oro.*"

"Gold," repeated Ralston in excited English. "So there's something to the ol' rumor after all."

His voice had become suddenly vibrant. He laughed aloud. He seized the bundled sweat-bag and untied the knots with eager fingers. He spread it out on the table and stood back looking at the contents, nuggets and yellow dust—gold—a double handful of it.

He scooped up the yellow dust in his bare hands and let the soft, greasy flakes sift through his fingers. The reaction was instant. His pulse quickened. The blood coursed hot and swift through his body and sudden sweat glistened on his forehead. He perched himself upon the edge of the table and mopped his brow with a big blue and white dotted kerchief.

"All right, Bubano," he said at length, "tell me what you saw and what you know."

He was speaking Bubano's own tongue now, the words popping from his lips like rapid explosions.

"It is as you heard it in the *vino* shop at Arito, señor," Bubano stated. "A white man, *un Americano*, is taking gold out of a mountainside in the country of the Ilongots. Though to say correctly, it is the Ilongots themselves who take out the gold. For the white man only walks up and down, talking in a great voice, telling them what to do."

"Did you learn what name he calls himself?" asked Ralston.

"No, señor, for I had no talk with any of them. I watched them at their work most all of one afternoon but did not let them see me. They do not know yet that I have been there. But this white man, he must have some very great power, for it seems sure he has made himself *apo*—master—of the Ilongots. Else why would they work for him as they have never worked before?"

"What does he look like, Bubano?"

"He is very short, señor, short and big, but biggest at the middle like a man who has had only rice and water for dinner, too much rice and too much water. Also he has much red hair and thick, red beard."

"Humph," said Ralston, "that sounds like 'Bolo' Miller. Now I wonder?"

"Oh, yes, señor, now that you mention the bolo, I remember that this white man of whom we speak wears no little gun at his side as all other *Americanos* do, but instead he carries two bolos hanging from his belt."

RALSTON slid so suddenly from the table where he sat that his feet hit the floor with a crash.

"By heaven," he snapped in angry English. "That *is* Bolo Miller. Always says a bolo is a better weapon for him than a gun.

Claims to be champion bolo thrower of the islands."

Then to the *cargador* in the latter's own language:

"Bubano," he said, "this man you have seen is a brother to the pig. White men disown him and Filipinos despise him after they know him for a very little time. He is a thief and whatever he is doing among the Ilongots is for no good."

"Then the Ilongots will dry his head at the end of a pole," was Bubano's laconic comment.

"That may be so," Ralston admitted, "but I'm taking no chances on it. You and me, Bubano, are going to pay this Bolo Miller a visit—*pronto*. I've something to settle with that *hombre* myself. See this scar at the base of my skull? Bolo Miller did that with one of his bolos. Aimed to cut the spinal cord, I guess, but didn't get in deep enough.

"He was my partner then. Got me in the night while I slept and beat it with my gold. Left me for dead way up among the highest peaks of Mount Amuyao. That's the kind he is, Bubano, and he's dangerous like a centipede—a crawling thing and whoever he crawls on is sure to be hurt.

"And that brings us to you, Bubano. I hired you for a *cargador*, not for a fighting man; and this is a fighting job—nothing else. I'll pay you off now if you like and you can go home. What do you say?"

Bubano's back stiffened and his chest puffed.

"Señor," he said, "have I ever played the part of a woman, that you speak these words to me? If I have not fought for you, señor, remember there has been no fighting to do."

"Yours is the talk of a man," answered Ralston, "and I ask you to forget my words."

"Let us make up the packs, señor."

That was Bubano's way of saying that all was right between them.

Ralston turned without another word and began rolling and arranging extra socks, underwear, a blanket, a shaving kit and such other items as went to make up his pack. And in the meantime, Bubano was busy packing food stuff, cooking things and working tools. Then when they had both finished their work, Ralston's glance fell upon the table and he exclaimed:

"Say, Bubano, you're leaving your gold. It's yours, you know."

"*Gracias, señor,*" said Bubano as he knotted the sweat-rag once more about the gold.

"How did you get hold of it without letting the Ilongots know you paid them a visit?" asked Ralston.

"On the day that I watched the Ilongots, señor, they put the gold in a small jar as fast as they washed it out of the dirt. At the close of the day's work one of the men carried this small jar to a spring of water that is at the high end of the valley where they work and here he emptied the gold into a large jar which is placed in the spring.

"Then he went away and no one was left to watch the gold. Many people came and took water from the spring but no one touched the gold. Late that night, when they were all asleep, I climbed down into the spring and took my two hands full of gold so that I might show it to you, señor. After that I came away as fast as I could go."

"Why do they put the gold in a spring?"

"I do not know, señor. No man knows the why of Ilongot ways."

"Well, we'll know the why of this stunt pretty soon," said Ralston. "Let's get started."

He swung his pack up to his humped, narrow shoulders and left the shack. Bubano followed at Ralston's heels, carrying his burden by means of a head sling.

They walked along a winding, unpaved street, their feet sinking in the deep dust a soft plop, plop, plop at each step. Dupax was just swinging into the routine of a new day. Filipino women with baskets of fruit and sweets upon their heads and flapping sandals clinging to their stockingless, brown toes straggled into the market square, arranged their baskets on the bare ground and squatted behind them, ready for barter.

Beyond the market square, the street that Ralston and Bubano followed, continued its dusty way between two drab rows of grass-roofed huts, the yard of each hut alive with brown and naked little children. Still farther on and back from the street stood the Government schoolhouse, a low, flat structure, walled with wattled bamboo splits, roofed with grass and shaded by tall coco palms.

The school grounds were filling rapidly

with native boys and girls of all sizes and ages, though it was still an hour before their morning studies would begin. They gathered about in groups, laughing and playing games, black heads bobbing, brown arms and brown legs flashing.

Their dress and appearance ran the category from lithe and gee-stringed youths to fat little girls, clumsy in American shoes and stockings. But they were entirely uniform in one particular—their talking, which, except for an occasional native word, was proudly confined to English.

Ralston made a hand motion toward the school children.

"If the Ilongots would do that," he said—"send their young ones to school—they'd soon get civilized and quit head-hunting same as the other tribes have done."

"Ilongots never get civilized," asserted Bubano.

"Oh yes, they will. Uncle Sam never quits. Always finishes anything he starts. See what he's done already in these mountains. Look at that school-house there and the children actually waiting to get in. That's more than the Spaniards were able to do during their whole rule of over three hundred years. But old Uncle Sam turned the trick in less than six."

It was a most unusual speech for Ralston to make. He was not given to boasting on any score and now he was half ashamed and at a loss to know what had prompted this outburst. It never occurred to him that his national pride had been stirred by the present manifestation of America's success in the islands. He turned and went on the way of his journey. Bubano followed, saying nothing.

They passed out of Dupax and took a narrow foot path that ran toward the east and across a wide stretch of rice paddies. They came to a shallow stream and crossed it at the foot of a large, bare mountain. Here was a four mile climb. A dim trail zigzagged up a steep grade.

The hot sun fairly rolled down the trail in scorching billows and surged upon the climbers. Dripping sweat filled Ralston's eyes, trickled down his spine in a clinging rivulet and came through his faded blue cambric shirt in streaks and splotches. And Bubano's naked body shone like glazed bronze. They toiled upward, bending forward from the waist to equalize their balance.

AT THE end of two hours they reached the mountain top. They slipped their packs in the shade of a lone clump of brushes and sat down for a short rest.

Miles and miles away to the south they could see Las Salinas—salt springs—whose deposits sparkled, danced and scintillated in the hot air. Immediately below them, at the foot of the mountain, was the beginning of a dense jungle and likewise the beginning of Ilongot territory.

Ralston leaned back on one elbow and stretched out his long legs.

"Which way is Campote?" he asked.

"That way," answered Bubano, pointing east, "about two hours from here."

Campote was merely a point where the Government had built a school-house and stationed a Christian Filipino as teacher. This teacher, protected by a corporal's guard of constabulary, opened his school daily and sat there alone, waiting for the Ilongots to accept the Government's invitation to send their young ones in to be enlightened. So far, none had come.

"East of here," mused Ralston, still speaking of Campote. "Then we don't touch there on our way?"

"No, señor, we go straight south from here."

After a short rest, Ralston and Bubano took up their packs and made their way down the mountain on the opposite side from where they had ascended. The two men entered the jungle which they had seen from above and Bubano took the lead.

He knew the most direct route. They traveled south. There was no trail in this primeval wilderness and very little sunlight ever found its way through the thick tangle of vines and leaves overhead. They tramped through broad patches of deep, mossy mold that sent up a heavy smell of musty dampness.

Stubborn branches caught at the packs and jerked them, like grasping hands, from side to side on the men's shoulders. And often they crawled on hands and knees, the packs swung around in front, hanging from their chests. At other times they stood erect and hacked their way with heavy bolos, through bush rope and ironwoods.

"Bubano, is this why you took more time on your trip than we thought you would?" asked Ralston, indicating some

vines and brushes through which they had just slashed their way.

"*Sí, señor.* We allowed too short a time, not being used to this sort of jungle. There is none so thick in all Northern Luzon."

"Maybe that's why we're not seeing any Ilongots now," said Ralston. "Guess this part of their jungle is too tough for them."

"There is no jungle too tough, as you say it, señor, for the Ilongots. If they have not spied us out and carried word of our coming to Chief Namalgo before this time, it is because the gold digging has put a spell upon them and they have forgotten to send out patrols."

The going was slow indeed and night was coming on before Ralston and his *cargador* had gone very far in the jungle. The wan daylight began to fade and chattering monkeys swung along their over-world trails, going home for the night. Startled birds, screeching abuse at these disturbers, fluttered from their chosen roosts, but quickly settled back again to drowsy silence. Darkness shrouded the jungle with a black shroud and great, black bats flapped out from their daytime sleep and winged across the sky, their three foot wings darker than the night.

Ralston and Bubano divided the night between them, one sleeping while the other kept watch.

Morning came, dim, hot and oppressive in the fetid jungle. Bubano made a fire with the driest limbs he could find—these send up the least smoke—boiled coffee and fried bacon. They ate and set out again for the scene of the gold digging.

They took turns at hacking their way through the thick places, much the same as men in the north take turns at breaking a snow trail.

It was a little past midafternoon when Bubano suddenly flung up one hand and stopped, crouching low. He had been making signs for silence and caution for an hour or more, but this was the first time he had actually halted. Ralston crawled silently to the other's side and both men slipped their packs. Then they worked carefully forward a few yards more and peered through a screen of low-hanging palm fronds and small bushes.

There was much to be seen though Ralston saw but little, indeed, during that first glance except in a cursory sort of way. For at first just one single object gripped his entire interest. This object was a man, a white man, Bolo Miller.

All unconsciously, Ralston's hand went to the back of his head and fingered the scar at the base of his skull. The feel of this scar always reminded him of Miller and now, reversely, seeing Miller had reminded him of the scar which had suddenly become an angry, red welt.

The lines in Ralston's face by this time were set in grim hate and his fingers curled like the half unsheathed claws of some snarling, jungle cat.

"That's him," he said in a hard, tense voice. "That's Bolo Miller."

"Why do you not shoot him, señor? It would be easy from here."

"And have the whole tribe at our heels? We'd never get out of here alive. For some reason they believe in him, else they'd have chopped his head off before now."

Ralston had spoken low and guardedly—the Ilongots were that close—and now he turned back to his observation. Bolo Miller sauntered about among the workers, a half-smoked cigaret hanging from his under lip. He appeared to have absolute authority over the Ilongots.

A mere motion from him was sufficient to bring somebody on the jump, ready to do his bidding. He wore a dirty, sweat-streaked undershirt and a pair of once-white trousers cut off at the knees. He was short and burly. As Bubano had said, he was biggest at the middle.

From the waist-band he tapered, somewhat acutely, up to a bullet-shaped head that was crowned with shaggy, red hair. He also wore a red and unkempt beard. From the waist down he dwindled swiftly to bare and calloused feet. He had turned native, even to the extent of going barefooted.

WHEN Ralston finally drew his eyes away from Miller and began taking note of the general scene, the hate which at first dominated his facial expression had changed to a look of contempt.

Directly below him Ralston saw the beginning of a narrow valley. The first impression was that a V-shaped slice had been taken out of the mountain to a depth of about thirty feet. And in the very point of this V a spring gently overflowed and ran off in a shallow stream down the center of the valley. It was rather a large spring,

about ten feet across and something like half that deep. However the water was clear and Ralston could plainly see a large red jar which stood upon the gravel bottom.

"That is the jar they put the gold in, señor," said Bubano, noting the object of Ralston's attention.

As the little valley stretched away down the mountain, the slope of the gray, barren walls on either side became more and more gradual. And both slopes were dotted with lean-to shelters of dry palm fronds, the nearest thing to huts that the Ilongots ever built.

Ralston centered his attention next on the men who were doing the work. There were nearly two score of them, very small and very dark-brown, all naked except for scant gee-strings. Their hair was long and they wore it done up in knots at the back of their heads. Some of them were grubbing and scratching rubble from seams between solid blocks of lava, while others carried this rubble in baskets to the stream, where still another group washed out the gold which was poured into a small, earthen jar after each washing.

Time passed. The sun disappeared behind the mountains, on the western side—a hint of coming night. A word from Bolo Miller and the Ilongots dropped their tools and ended the day's work. Then one of the dark-brown little men, his long, jet-black hair knotted at the back of his head, lifted the small jar that contained the gold and held it, with one curved arm, against his naked side.

He made his way up the little valley, directly toward the spring, a companion coming with him. Arrived at the spring, these two hauled the big red jar up from the water and poured the gold from the small jar into the big one. Then they lowered the big jar down again to the bottom of the spring, This done, the two Ilongots went back the way they had come.

Ralston reached in the pocket of his shirt and brought out a battered note book, a short, worn pencil and wrote:

Dupax, P. I.,
June 7th 1908.

BOLO MILLER:

You've got just twenty-four hours to get out. After that I'm bringing down the constabulary, to arrest you for robbing and attempting to murder me. I also understand the Government wants you for several other little things. RALSTON.

He tore the leaf from his notebook and folded it.

"Bubano," he asked, "didn't you tell me once that you'd be safe visiting the Ilongots?"

"*Sí, señor.* Chief Namalgo is my friend. My sister was his wife till she died."

"Then go down there and deliver this note to the white man. Say that you were hired in Dupax to bring the note. If any one asks who hired you, tell him what I look like. But don't even look this way. Ask your friend the chief, to let you stay with him till morning.

"That will be natural, for you could not go back through the jungle in the night-time. Spread your sleeping mat at the edge of their camp, near the stream, and after you lie down, light a cigaret. Strike three matches before you finally get it lighted. That way I will know where you sleep.

"I expect to come to you tonight. If I don't, you must go back to Dupax in the morning. Don't come near me again. Go now, and remember that you know nothing except that you were hired to bring the note."

Ralston turned again to his lookout to watch for Bubano's arrival with the note, or rather to observe Bolo Miller's action upon receiving the note.

Down at the native camp the women were lighting fires, preparing to cook the evening meal. The men were sitting about on the ground, smoking and resting after the day's work, their legs crossed, Turk fashion, before them. Bolo Miller prowled along the cliff from whence the gold was being taken, a half-smoked cigaret hanging from his under lip. He appeared to be pondering something, wondering, perhaps, what his final haul would be.

Presently Ralston saw Bubano walking boldly down the northern slope of the little valley. He crossed the stream, the shallow water reaching no higher than his ankles. Some one called out something. Several men rose hurriedly, grasping their long spears. Bubano spoke to them and a man who was much taller and larger than the others came forward. This one said something to the others and they put away their spears.

"That will be Chief Namalgo," Ralston told himself.

Bubano and Namalgo talked together a

few moments and then went on to where Bolo Miller stood by the gold-bearing seams in the cliff. Miller read the note and said something to Namalgo, evidently he gave some explanation. Then Namalgo and Bubano walked calmly back to camp. Obviously Miller had given no hint of what the note contained, else there would have been great excitement among them.

Ralston changed position to ease his cramped legs, but still kept his eye on the camp in the valley below. Shadows grew thick in the jungle and one lone large star appeared in the western sky. Camp-fires grew brighter and the Ilongots became mere moving shadows, distinctly humans only when they walked between Ralston and some one of the many fires.

Bolo Miller appeared from out of the darkness and squatted alone by one of the fires. A native woman came presently and cooked food for him. He ate, the woman went away and he sat on, alone.

The fires died down. The great blue-black dome above was studded with thousands of stars. Ralston saw a man carrying something on his arm across the dull flare of one low fire down near the stream. A moment later three matches flared near the ground. That was Bubano signaling his location. Ralston noted that it was at the root of an old dead tree.

A GREAT, round moon came up out of the Pacific and flooded the earth with light. Ralston sat on through the hours of his vigil. All human noises grew still but the night was filled with the voices of the insects. They hummed and zipped and the mosquitos whined and bit and bit again. Ralston's neck and face and hands were burning from their bites. But even so, the tall, hump-shouldered one found himself getting drowsy. He shifted his long legs about and wished that Bubano were there to take the watch for a while.

Suddenly Ralston threw up his head and straightened his narrow shoulders. He must have been nodding. But something, some slight sound that was not a part of the insect symphony, had aroused him. He was instantly alert, tense. He strained his eyes and ears. Yes, something was moving down below, near the spring, but, whatever it was, it moved in the shadows. Ralston waited eagerly. He was sure that he knew what it was that was moving down there.

The big round moon threw its pale light fully upon the spring. The water was smooth and silvery. Presently a hunched, bulky something emerged from the shadows and stopped by the spring. The something straightened and stood up. It was a man. It was Bolo Miller. He was standing fully in the moonlight now and there was no doubt.

Bolo Miller spread a piece of canvas on the ground, then lay hold of the rope which was attached to the big jar of gold and began hauling it up from the spring. Ralston waited for no more. This was just what he had expected and hoped for. He backed carefully away from the place where he had been watching and worked his way along the northern wall of the valley, keeping well up among the bushes so that Miller would not see him. He stooped and crawled, trying to go silently but it seemed to him that he made noise enough to arouse the dead.

Once he snapped a twig and it sounded to him like the report of a pistol. Surely Miller must have heard that, but there was no time to waste and he hurried on. Now he was going down into the valley. Now he was at the stream—and across. He located the old dead tree, the one where the three matches had flared. Then at last he was shaking Bubano.

"Up. Quick," he commanded, "and show me to the chief."

"Easy, easy," cautioned Ralston as they went. "Don't get the whole crowd up and excited."

In two or three minutes at most, Bubano had led Ralston to the sleeping chief and that too, without waking any of the Ilongots. Bubano shook Namalgo gently. The chief awoke, instantly alert.

"Your white friend is stealing the gold from the spring," Ralston told Namalgo in a low, guarded voice.

The chief could see by the clear moonlight that it was a white man talking. He stared in dumb amazement and then his eyes wandered to Bubano.

"Whatever he says will be true," Bubano assured the chief.

"What does he mean?" asked Namalgo.

"He means that the Red One is taking the gold from the spring," answered Bubano.

"They call this white man who robbed

you, 'the Red One,'" Bubano turned and explained to Ralston.

"Quick, chief," said Ralston, seeing that Namalgo understood at last, "get your men up without noise. Send the first three you wake to the head of the valley above the spring to head the Red One off if he tries to escape that way. He'll be coming down the stream any minute now, so work fast."

The Ilongot men were all up in a matter of minutes, for as fast as one had been aroused he had been sent to arouse others. Three men, armed with spear and head knife, waited now above the spring and the others crouched along the stream lower down. And all of this had been managed in less than ten minutes since Ralston left his lookout above the spring.

Ralston, Namalgo and Bubano were crouched at the middle of the Ilongot line. They had all been told of what was afoot. Bolo Miller left the spring and started downstream, carrying a heavy pack on his shoulders. He was making no pretense at keeping to cover, believing, of course, that every one was asleep.

The men could see him, but they remained crouched among the bushes and behind boulders, awaiting word from Namalgo. Suddenly the chief, Ralston and Bubano stood up. Miller saw them, dropped the heavy load of gold and ran back upstream. Ralston and the other two ran down to the pack. Ralston cut the ropes.

The Ilongots were gathering around. Namalgo threw back the folds of canvas and they saw the gold gleaming dully in the moonlight. Namalgo gave one short, terse command. It was equivalent to "go" and they went, a yelling, shrieking mob of enraged, head-hunting fiends.

Bolo Miller reached the head of the valley and clambered up the steep wall. The three men up there met him with spears drawn back. He slid hurriedly down and doubled back on his track like a hemmed-in hare. A moment later the headhunters closed in on him. For a short space they were so thick about the fallen man that Ralston could not see what was going on. Then one lone man came staggering away from the heaving, flailing mass. He was shouting a weird pæan of triumph, holding a dripping head at arm's length.

"Ugh! The —— savage," said Ralston, and turned away, disgusted.

He had known all along just what would happen. He had planned it just that way. But the sight of the real thing was a distinct shock to his civilized sense of decency. He walked solemnly back to camp, where the women and children had built fresh fires. The man with the red-bearded, red-haired head was there, holding the grizzly thing up before the excited, chattering crowd that had already gathered around him.

The men talked loud and gustily, their lust for blood wholly unleashed. Several of them darted evil looks at Ralston and he knew that he was facing a critical moment. He glanced about, wondering what was best to do. He saw Namalgo coming toward the fires and went to meet him, having a vague feeling that he would not be attacked while talking with the chief.

"Chief," asked Ralston, "how did the Red One first sneak into the trust and counsel of the Ilongots?"

"The Red One is dead," asserted Namalgo. "But what do you here?"

The chief's voice, like his bearing toward Ralston, was anything but friendly.

"I heard that the Red One was here," Ralston answered, "and I knew he would rob you some way. So I came to stop him."

"How did you know that he would steal the gold tonight?"

"I sent him a word on paper that would scare him and make him want to leave here quick. I thought he would not leave without trying to take the gold with him, so I watched for him above the spring and you have seen what happened."

Bubano came now from somewhere and stood with Ralston and the chief.

"Why did you wish to do this for the Ilongots, señor?"

The chief's voice was not as unfriendly this time and he appeared mildly curious.

"Because the Red One robbed me once and tried to kill me. Here is the path of his bolo across my neck."

Ralston removed his hat, craned his neck so that the chief could see, and indicated the scar at the base of his skull.

BY THIS time the men of the tribe had begun to dance. It was a stiff-legged affair with slow, precise gestures, a celebration of triumph. And the women, their eyes fixed on the dancers,

chanted in a loud but rhythmic chorus. The noise was so great that Ralston could not understand what Namalgo said upon seeing the scar.

The white man took a step toward the stream, indicating by a gesture that they should get farther away from the noise. Namalgo and Bubano followed and presently they stood in the shadow of some bushes, far enough away to hear themselves talk. They were out of sight of the tribe here and Ralston realized that this might be his opportunity to escape.

But he needed a few minutes in which to think out a plan. He could gain the necessary time by getting Namalgo to talk, so he repeated his question as to how Bolo Miller—the Red One—had worked himself into the confidence of the Ilongots.

"He came to us one morning by our cook fires," Namalgo began. "He came so silently that no man of us saw him till he spoke. And then we saw that he carried in one hand a fresh-taken head."

" 'Greetings, my brothers of the Ilongot tribe,' he said.

" 'The Ilongots have no white brothers,' I answered him.

" 'Call me not a white man,' was his reply. 'It is my sorrow that my skin is white, but not my fault. But you are my brothers for you are headhunters and I also am a headhunter. Look at this head,' he continued, 'and see if it is not one you have been seeking.'

"We looked and saw truly that it was a head we had been hunting, the head of one Ifulgo pig thief who had stolen a pig from us."

" 'The spirits told me that you wanted this head,' the Red One said when he saw that we had recognized the head, 'and I have brought it to you as proof of my friendship.'

" 'But why do you give us your friendship?' I asked him.

" 'Because we are headhunters alike and because the Ilongot tribe is the only tribe that the white men have not made into cowards and children.'

"Then he showed us some of his skill with the bolo; and never had we seen such skill before. He could throw his bolo straighter than any man of us could shoot an arrow. He asked us to throw spears at him and we threw five different times and not one spear touched him for he caught them all on the point of his bolo. Also he told us many things that he would do for us and we believed him for he told us secrets of the tribe that we thought unknown to any white man. He knew also the law that Chief Gurimana had left concerning our gold."

Ralston had worked out his plan of escape and by this time was listening again to what Namalgo said.

"Who was Chief Gurimana?" he asked.

"He was chief of the Ilongots when the Spaniards first came to these mountains looking for gold, taking gold from the tribes and defiling the women. Gurimana watched the other tribes give up their gold and grow weak and he said it was because their gold was gone.

" 'The gold in the ground,' said Chief Gurimana, 'is the strength of the tribe that owns it. Therefore, if the gold is taken from the ground, the tribe will grow weak and be no more. Look you at the other tribes and see that I have spoken true words. And soon the white men will come to us asking where our gold may be found. But no Ilongot shall tell them. That is the law and any Ilongot who disobeys this law shall forfeit his head.' "

"That was a wise law," said Ralston. "But how did the Red One claim that he knew about it?"

"He said the spirits told him."

Ralston laughed.

"I guess some Ilongot with a bellyful of bottle spirits told him. But how did he get you to dig up the gold?"

"With his crooked tongue, he did that. He made us believe that we would get more strength from the gold by digging it up and putting it in the spring. He said we would then drink the strength of the gold every day."

"Namalgo," said Ralston abruptly, "do you know the power of the little guns that white men use?"

"Yes. One of them bit my leg at a time when we raided Dupax."

"And this one," snapped Ralston, whipping out his revolver, "will bite your heart out unless you keep very quiet and do just as I tell you."

Namalgo was both afraid and angry, but he knew enough to hold his tongue. The chanting and the dancing behind them was still going on. The Ilongots were not likely to miss their chief for some time yet.

The three men crossed the stream and, keeping to the bushes, reached the head of the valley above the spring without being seen.

"WE'RE going back to Dupax now, Bubano," Ralston said. "You take the lead and Namalgo will follow you. I'll bring up the rear. Daylight is coming now and you'll soon be able to follow the trail we made yesterday coming in."

"Does the señor mean to leave the gold behind?" asked Bubano.

"Sure do," said Ralston. "We'll be lucky to get out of here with our heads, at least I will be. Besides I have a proposition to offer Namalgo; and I think he'll accept it too. But that comes later. Let's get going now."

"But our packs. Has the señor forgotten them?"

"Too heavy. We must travel light and fast. Nothing in 'em that's worth a great deal any way."

Daylight was breaking through the jungle foliage. Bubano found the newly made trail and Namalgo followed him, stolidly accepting his fate. Ralston kept his revolver in his hand, ready for instant use. The chance of their being followed and overtaken was small. They had the start and they traveled as fast as the Ilongots could possibly follow.

Keeping to the trail of the day before they reached the edge of Ilongot territory by noon and likewise, the foot of that large, bald mountain which Ralston and Bubano had climbed the morning before. There was no indication that the Ilongots were near them, even if following at all.

"Now, Namalgo," said Ralston, "you are free to go back, but first I must tell you of my proposition, the one I spoke of this morning. It is this: The Ilongots must come to school at Campote."

"No," snapped Namalgo, his eyes blazing.

"Take your choice," said Ralston. "If there are not at least thirty Ilongots in the school-house at Campote on the third morning from this morning, I will give the secret of your gold to all white men. But if the Ilongots come to school, at least thirty of them each day, I will keep the secret."

Ralston waited several minutes while Namalgo sulked in silence.

"Never mind your answer, now," Ralston said at last. "You have till the third morning to act. Now go."

Namalgo went without a word. Ralston and Bubano skirted the mountain and found the trail to Campote.

"Follow this trail to the school-house," Ralston instructed Bubano, "and wait there till the third morning. Then come to me in the shack at Dupax and tell me what they have done."

RALSTON sat at his noontime meal in the shack at Dupax. A shadow darkened the open door and Ralston looked up.

"Well," he said.

"The Ilongots came to school this morning," said Bubano. "Thirty of them."

FROG

by Charles Victor Fischer

Author of "To the Dogs," "Salt on a Bird's Tail," etc.

IT BEGAN on the decks of the gunboat *Wheeler*, one warm, lazy afternoon, far out on the Pacific down near the Island of Guam, which was the next stop of the *Wheeler*, she being *en route* from San Francisco to Manila. It was "Froggy" Laporte, a ship's cook, first class, who began it.

There was tiptoe expectancy in Froggy's flashing black eyes that afternoon, as he stepped aft along the quarter-deck. In fact, everything about Froggy breathed that attitude of tiptoe expectancy. Slim shoulders well back, head high, he stepped as only a lithe, wiry little tar of twenty-eight, chock-full of confidence, can step.

That Froggy was going back to make request for something was obvious; his sharp, prominent nose pointed straight at Commander Winnie, the *Wheeler's* captain, whose six feet of big-boned leanness lay sprawled in a deep wicker chair, far back on the quarter-deck in the shade of the awning. And never had a better groomed tar strutted aft along that deck, Froggy's thin, sharp-featured, sun-browned face was as smooth and soft as the ship's barber had been able to make it for eighty-five cents.

His hair black, black eyebrows, black mustache and the tiny triangular tuft of black just above the point of his long tapering chin were highly waxed. He wore spotless tailor-made whites that fitted his slight but clean-cut figure well. And he had paid Tony Sigaranzillio, an erstwhile Broadway bootblack, sixty cents to put that shine on his shoes. For it paid a man to look to his personal appearance when going before Winnie to make a request.

Froggy came to a snappy halt beside the big wicker chair, saluted and stood looking down into Winnie's indomitable gray eyes. A handsome face, Winnie's, in a strong, virile way; much lined and furrowed for a man of forty-five, but with a tigerish strength about it, with purpose and character in every line and furrow. Just now he looked up at Froggy with a faint smile, and an all's-well flicker in his eyes.

"I got the executive officer's permission to speak to you, sir," stated Froggy.

"Uh-huh," said Winnie, in a low encouraging tone.

"Captain, it's like this," Froggy was off with his troubles: "Coupla months ago I'm on the cruiser *Farallone* in 'Frisco. I takes thirty days' furlough, figurin' I'll get married. I got a little girl named Marie, sir, a cute little trick of a frog—she's pure frog, sir—that I meets durin' the war, one time when I'm on liberty in Marseilles, France.

"You see sir, when I takes this furlough from the *Farallone* in 'Frisco, Marie is still over in Marseilles. Still I figures I can get her to Frisco in a couple or three weeks, leavin' us a week or so for a honeymoon.

"Anyhow I cables her to pack her bag and hammock an' shake a leg for Frisco. I cables her seven hundred beans, sir. You see, I'd been buckin' the cat in Frisco

"Frog" Copyright 1925, by Charles Victor Fischer.

Kelley's place, an' things had been breakin' my way, an' I figures naturally ——"

"Never mind the side issues, lad," Winnie cut in, "you cabled Marie to come ——"

"Yes, sir. But she has a little trouble gettin' under weigh, an' makin' connections an' like o' that, so that she fails to make Frisco till the last day of my furlough."

Froggy paused a moment. Then with a sweeping gesture and an impulsive snap of his fingers:

"It ain't my way to postpone things, sir. That afternoon when I meets Marie steppin' off the Oakland ferry in Frisco, I got just two hours left on my furlough. But we shakes a leg, Marie an' me. We're married pronto. Then we hikes around and finds two furnished rooms. By then, of course, my thirty days' furlough are up, an' it's time I got back aboard. So we piles in a taxi an' scuds for the dock where the *Farallone's* boats put in. I figures I'll check in from my furlough, get overnight liberty, an' check right out again—come back ashore in the next boat—I leaves Marie waitin' on the dock, sir.

"But the trouble was, sir, the *Farallone* was under orders to pull out for China that same afternoon. When I gets back aboard, the officer of the deck tells me there ain't any more liberty. No more boats. No, sir!"—with another snap of his fingers— "He won't even let me hail a shore boat to run in an' tell Marie the honeymoon's off for a while—an' give her the dope on how to get to Shanghai!"

Froggy stopped, his black eyes flashing indignation, the needle-like ends of his mustache pointing skyward aggressively.

"BUT the skipper of the *Farallone*, Captain Doone, saves the day, sir," he continued, relaxing.

"After I explains things, an' he takes a look through a pair of binoculars at Marie over on the dock, he grants me an extension of ten days on my furlough. An' transfers me on the head of it; when my ten days expire I'm to report in to the receiving-station on Goat Island. Which makes our honeymoon look good again, sir.

"Only things didn't work out that way, sir. No sooner does the *Farallone's* boat land me over on the dock in Frisco, where Marie's been waitin', than another boat comes across the bay, a steamer from Goat Island, her coxs'n, bowman an' engineer all wavin' their arms an' yellin' at once. We stands there waitin,' Marie an' me, sir, till that boat hits the dock.

"The cox'n's all excited, sir. 'Say,' he shouts, 'is your name Laporte, an' are you a ship's cook first class?' You're —— right, I answers. 'Then jump aboard,' says he. You poor simp! I goes back, I'm on a furlough! 'I can't help that,' he grins. 'The commandant's orders are to bring you back to the station pronto. Jump aboard.' "

Froggy paused for breath. Winnie only grunted. Then with another snap of his fingers, Froggy was off again.

"I claim it was a raw deal, sir! There was Marie an' me, just about to start out on ten days' honeymoon— An' wha'd'yuh think they did, sir, when I got over on Goat Island? They shanghai me right on board a big tug, sir, the *Saraso!* An' she's all ready for sea! Yes, sir! I'd no more than got off one outbound packet than I'm on another. An' this one I'm on now, the *Saraso*, she's bound for Sitka, Alaska, with a lot of junk for the radio station up there.

"You see, sir, the *Saraso* didn't have a ship's cook, an' it was up to the commandant on Goat Island to send her one. An' naturally, when my accounts an' records comes over from the *Farallone*, he gloms right on to me. I'm the only available ship's cook he's got to transfer to the *Saraso*. So I'm the goat—Marie an' me. An' there she is, still over on that dock, sir, waitin' an' cryin'!

"WHAT can I do, sir? Orders is orders. The *Saraso* is leavin' pronto. She's gonna follow the *Farallone* out through the Golden Gate. I braces the skipper of the *Saraso* on how's chances to run in an' tell Marie what's what. But he's got my number.

"He thinks if he lets me go ashore I won't come back an' he won't let me go. All I can do is send Marie a note, with a chink laundryman, tellin' her the honeymoon is off 'till I get back from Alaska. Wha'd'yuh think o' that, sir."

"Say, that was rather rough, wasn't it," Winnie said, sympathetically.

"But that ain't the worst of it," Froggy raced on. "I ain't seen Marie since, sir! No, sir! Comin' down from Alaska I gets the yeoman on the *Saraso* to write me out a request for transfer to the radio station

on the Island of Guam. I'd heard, that since they built the new radio station out there they rated a ship's cook.

"It looks like a good billet for Marie an' me, sir. We'll have a little government bungalow, with coconut trees in the back yard an' all that; no rent to pay, a dollar a day extra for chow allowance, with nothin' to do but throw out three feeds a day to the gang, an' be over in the bungalow with Marie between times. An' maybe later we'll have a couple or three little frogs. It looks good, sir.

"An' the skipper of the *Saraso* approves my request, 'cause he knows he's got another ship's cook comin' back in Frisco. So when we stops at Seattle on the way down, I writes to Marie, tellin' her to shake a leg an' get aboard the next transport for the Philippines stoppin' at Guam, givin' her the dope on who to see an' all that.

"She's a snappy little frog, sir, Marie is. She gets my letter the day before the army transport, the *Delawanna*, pulls out for the Asiatics. Marie snaps right to it, sir, an' gets a ticket on that packet. She shouldn't have done that, sir; she should have waited for the next one, the *Sheridan*."

"Why, yes," said Winnie, grinning broadly. "The *Delawanna* went up to Yokohama, then to Shanghai, then to Manila——"

"Sure, sir! An' don't make Guam till on her way back to Frisco from Manila. But she's a suspicious little frog, Marie is, sir, an' can't sling the English good yet, an' I suppose when them army-transport guys tried to explain things, tried to tell her that Guam was the *Delawanna's* last stop, why, she gets a notion they're tryin' to hang one over.

"An' she's got a head of her own, Marie has, sir. Anyhow she makes the *Delawanna* out of Frisco, bound for Guam, thinkin' of course that the ship I'm on must be bound for Guam too.

Froggy stopped. Winnie was now sitting up, smiling in amused perplexity.

"I see," he said finally. "Marie is coming ——"

"—right to Guam, yes, sir. Same as us, only from the other direction. She's been on that packet for five weeks, sir, rambling all over the Asiatics. An' now the radio gang tells me, sir, that they heard the *Delawanna* last night, an' that she's headin' for Guam from Manilla."

Winnie nodded. "That's right, We intercepted a message from her last night. She arrives at Guam late in the afternoon of day after tomorrow."

"With Marie on board, sir!" Froggy's eyes shone like two black diamonds, as he hesitated. "We get in to Guam tomorrow morning, sir . . . We pull out next morning, sir—the day the *Delawanna* pulls in. We leave Guam for Manila in the morning. She gets in to Guam from Manila in the afternoon—with Marie on board, sir."

Winnie nodded solemnly. Froggy hurried on:

"Then all I get, sir, is a look at Marie through a pair of binoculars—if we're lucky an' pass the *Delawanna* close enough. An' all I've had, sir, since the day I married her in Frisco, is one look."

Winnie stood up. They stood eye to eye Winnie looking down, Froggy looking up.

"I leave it to you, sir, if I didn't get a raw deal!" Froggy went on, in falsetto now. "I came back down to 'Frisco on the *Saraso*. I got in a request for the radio station at Guam. It's approved by the skipper of the *Saraso*. I'm all hunky-dory. My wife's already on her way to Guam. Then what does the commandant on Goat Island do but go over the skipper of the *Saraso's* head an' tear up my request an' shanghai me to this ship. Was that raw, sir?"

Winnie frowned. "Well, I suppose it was," he said slowly.

"No commandant that was half human would've done it, sir."

Winnie smiled. "You know, lad, commandants in general are no respecters of persons. I hardly ——"

"I'll say they ain't, sir."

"But I hardly think, lad, that the commandant in San Francisco would have vetoed your request for Guam if another ship's cook had been available for this ship. After we came out of the navy yard it was up to him to fill our complement. We had only one ship's cook aboard. We rate three, you know. We're still one man short."

"I know, sir. But you'll soon be out in the islands. There's oodles of ship's cooks in excess, in the Asiatic Fleet."

"There's no such thing, lad. There isn't a ship's cook in excess, in Asiatic waters."

Froggy dropped his eyes to Winnie's big

shoes. But he was not squelched, by a long ways.

"There's three seamen on this ship, sir," —he turned the argument—"any one of 'em would make good as a ship's cook if you gave him a chance."

Without replying, Winnie turned and walked listlessly outboard to the rail, his eyes on the blue horizon. Froggy had followed close at his elbow.

"You could drop me off at Guam tomorrow, sir," he persisted—"transfer me to the radio station there."

"We could," Winnie assented.

Silence.

"I'd like Guam, sir."

Winnie shot him a glare. "So would I!" he snapped. Then, softening: "But in the Navy, lad, it's not what we'd like. I've had in a request for shore duty on some radio station, for two years. It's been pigeon-holed in Washington ever since the armistice was signed."

Then Froggy, as the saying is, "put his foot in it."

"I've got a clear record, sir," he bragged.

"I know it. Only the other day I was looking at it. Aside from a few petty offenses, your slate is clean, lad."

"All them petty offenses was accidental-like," Froggy spoke up in palliation.

"Didn't you—on the *Farallone*"—with a big bony hand Winnie covered the lower half of his face—"hit an officer in the eye——"

"With an egg, yes, sir. Accidental, sir. I heaves that egg at a shipmate who was botherin' me. He ducks, an' the officer gets the egg in the eye, sir."

"And didn't that egg turn out to be over-ripe?"

Froggy grinned and pulled at the points of his mustache. It was time to change the subject.

"I'm up to snuff on 'proficiency in ratin',' too, sir," he said with pride. "Ask any man on the ship, sir, if I didn't go about decks the first day I came aboard in 'Frisco, findin' out many men like their eggs flopped over an' how many like 'em eyes-open; also how many liked their steak rare, how many medium, how many well done; how many don't like liver. How many ship's cooks'll go to that trouble, sir?"

"Darn few," Winnie shot back, looking Froggy straight in the eye.

FROGGY'S hair, eyebrows and mustache fairly bristled with pride. His black eyes were blazing with confidence now, for he felt that he had Winnie on the run. He snapped his fingers.

"I always did that on every ship where I ever was, sir," he boasted. "I believe like Napoleon did: An army marches on its stomach. He had the dope, sir. Same with a ship's crew."

"That's the stuff, lad." Winnie uttered it in a sincere tone of voice. But there was a light in his eyes now that belied that attitude. It was that flicker of inward laughter. Froggy grew uneasy. Then indignation sent a rush of blood to his head. He returned Winnie's laughing gaze with a glare that said—

"What in blazes is the joke!"

"Yes," Winnie went on, in a low, smooth tone, but without taking his crafty eyes off Froggy's, "Napoleon certainly knew his mass psychology. He knew that one big secret of successful leadership—keep their bellies full." Then, growing confidential: "You know, Laporte, I think that old boy Napoleon would have made even a greater admiral than he did a general. Because the biggest item in the life of a sailor is his chow."

Winnie stopped. Still that tantalizing look in his eyes. Froggy was swallowing hard. It broke on him now that in his zealous attempt to work Winnie for this transfer he had got on the wrong track. He tried to tack back.

"Any one of them three seamen would make good as a ship's cook, sir."

It went over Winnie's head.

"Laporte," said the skipper, "what do you suppose Napoleon would say, if he were captain of a ship, and the best cook he had on board came to him and requested transfer?"

Froggy remained doggedly silent. Winnie put it differently.

"What would the three hundred men on this ship think of me, if I transferred the best ship's cook we've ever had?"

"But what'll Marie do, sir?"

"Answer me. What would my crew think of me if I transferred you to Guam?"

"Nobody on the dock to meet 'er, sir." And Froggy's tone attained a higher and higher pitch as he rambled on: "Her standin' there all alone on the dock, an' me headin' for the Philippines! She can't

have much money left in her sock by now, sir; she didn't have more'n coupla hundred leavin' Frisco. She don't know where to go nor what to do, sir. The poor little frog 'll be in a —— of a fix, sir!"

"Oh, you can arrange that," Winnie said easily. "You can go ashore in Guam tomorrow. Any officer on the island will see that Marie is looked after. Have her take the next west-bound transport back to Manila, that's all."

Winnie walked inboard then, toward the cabin hatchway. Shoulders hunched and

head thrust forward pugnaciously, Froggy glared after him in a way that was anything but respectful. The titters and snickers, wafted back from his shipmates up forward, played on his ears. The wind laughed in the overhead rigging, and so did the water, sloshing and foaming against the ship's side. Everything and everybody was happy, but Froggy.

"I ain't seen 'er since the day I married 'er in Frisco," he bleated plaintively. "You could transfer me, sir!"

Winnie halted at the head of the cabin hatchway.

"I could but I can't lad," he replied. "I'd like to but I don't like to. I think too much of the three hundred men under my command, lad. You're too good a man to lose. I could, and I would, but—well, I can't, and I won't."

With that Winnie disappeared down the cabin hatchway.

PERPLEXED, troubled, and with red wrath smoldering in his brain, Froggy slouched forward to the fo'csle. There he proceeded to pace fore and aft in long, wild strides. There was a tint of amber in his black eyes now, his face was a dark purplish red and the waxed points of his little mustache struck up aggressively.

And while he paced he talked. He told his shipmates, squatting and lounging about on the forecastle, told them with much flashing of eyes and snapping of fingers just what he thought of their "finest skipper in the Navy."

"Finest ——!" snapped Froggy, "if he was half human he wouldn't see a poor little kid of a frog only nineteen years old —and the wife of a continuous service man with a war record, get me—marooned on an island. Finest ——!"

Froggy had the sympathy of his shipmates. Yet every man on the fo'csle was glad inwardly that their peerless little ship's cook was not leaving the *Wheeler*.

"What are you gonna do about it, Frog?" queried "Oily" Peters, coxswain of the *Wheeler's* steam launch, who squatted on deck playing cribbage with old man Svanska, a sailmaker's mate.

Froggy halted. For a moment he just looked at Oily. Then—

"Tryin' to make fun o' me?"

He stepped over and stood glowering down at his shipmate.

"Maybe some smart guy like you can tell me what to do."

Oily continued his game unperturbed, a serene smile on his long, foxy face.

"I don't know, Frog," he answered finally. "I know what I'd do. I'd miss the ship. Why not go ashore tomorrow and stay overnight. Next morning hide up a coconut tree or somewhere, till we pull out for Manila. Then report in to the commanding officer of the radio station. Then, when your little oo-la-la comes in on the transport ——"

"She'd be finding him locked in de calaboose," chimed in Svanska. "An' dere iss lots of fun in dat shtinking hole, I tell you. I wass in dere oncet myself, when I went crasy wis dey boose on das —— island an' dey had to lock me up for fear I will cut someone's t'roat.

"It iss a —— of a hole for a man to be in, das calaboose. Dere iss rats an' dere

iss lissards an' dere iss mosquitoes in dey night time. An' in dey daytime dere iss marines to be keeping on a feller's tail an' making him yump around like a —— yumping-yack, picking up papers in de streets an' having every —— native laughing like a monkey at him."

"Aw, me neck!" growled Oily. "Lock him up! For what, missing the ship? Your eyebrow! Suppose when he reports in he tells 'em he was held up by some native—stuck up for his roll. Easy!" Oily turned to Froggy—

"Tell 'em a gang of niggers knocked you cuckoo and carried you out in the woods ——"

"Yah! Fine!" snorted Froggy. "But make 'em believe it! Make 'em believe it!"

"Froggy," said Oily, smoothly, convincingly, "you can make them believe anything—if you put it over right."

"An' if I put it over wrong ——"

"You'll draw a summary court martial. What's that? You'll lose three months' pay, that's all. But the point is, Frog, you'll be right there on the Island of Guam, when your little oo-la-la comes in on the transport."

FROGGY walked slowly out to the rail, his hands behind him, eyes on the deck. The idea was altogether out of harmony with his conscientious way of doing things. The mere thought of breaking liberty, jumping ship, missing ship had always struck a discord within him. But just now things looked different.

Two desires were at war within Froggy. One was to maintain a clean slate with Uncle Sam; the other, to meet Marie on the wharf in Piti, Guam's harbor port, in the afternoon of the day after tomorrow, when the *Delawanna* arrived from Manila. He couldn't do both. Froggy was wavering.

"Another thing, Frog," added Oily, laying down a six of clubs and pegging two holes on the cribbage board, "What will the governor of Guam do?"

"Shtick him in dey calaboose wis dey rats an' dey lissards," interjected Svanska, who then slapped down a six of spades, saying, "An' dot's eighteen for six holess, by yimminies."

"Maybe," said Oily, laying down a three of diamonds, making twenty-one for two more holes. Then he leaned forward and spoke close to Svanska's moon-like face.

"But on top of that, he'll radio Winnie to mail Frog's records and accounts and ship his bag and hammock back to Guam. The governor of Guam, remember, needs a ship's cook for his radio station. And remember, too, that the governor of Guam is a rear-admiral, and Winnie 'll have to do as he says. Frog'll stay right there on the island, as ship's cook of the radio station—him and his little oo-la-la."

Those last few words affected Froggy in much the same way as might a stiff hooker of whisky. He spun about on one heel, flashed Oily an ogling glance, sniffed, snapped his fingers to the skies and chirped —"la la!" Then head high and shoulders back, he strutted aft.

"Now dere will be —— popping," said Svanska. "You should know better as to put such —— fool idearss in dis feller's head. Dere iss fifteen-two, fifteen-four, fifteen-six, an' six iss a dossen."

OILY'S idea took root. And in Froggy's fertile mind an idea had to grow. He decided to miss the ship out of Guam. But not in the crude way Oily had suggested—that is, just go ashore and remain till after the *Wheeler* left for Manila. Froggy saw a better way. He would miss the ship; but in such a way as not to leave himself amenable, so that they would have nothing on him.

And Marie, his trim, petite, black-eyed little oo-la-la—would he meet her on the wharf in Piti, Guam—day-after-tomorrow? No. He would be on hand in a shoreboat to meet her at the *Delawanna's* gangway, the instant she dropped her anchor. Yes, sir; he would be waiting out at the harbor's entrance when the *Delawanna* rounded Orote Point. He would run in the harbor, close alongside of the transport—Marie, at the rail up on the promenade deck, screaming down at him—

"Franceese! Franceese! Mon grreatt hoosbond! Oo-oo-oo! La la la!"

And thus Froggy writhed and squirmed and goggled the night away.

Early in the forenoon of the next day Guam hove up on the horizon ahead. At eleven oclock the *Wheeler* had rounded Point Ritidion, the island's northern extremity, and was steaming southward along the western shore. Ten miles ahead was Orote Point, whose long, narrow peninsula reaches out into the Pacific like an arm,

pointing northwest, and encloses Apra Harbor, the *Wheeler's* destination.

It being Froggy's day off, he spent the forenoon hanging over the life-line amidships, gazing dreamily at the passing array of lofty mountains and verdant valleys and clusters of huts down near the sandy shore. What an isla of paradise to bring his Marie to!

Somewhere over there, down in the deeps of one of those wild coconut valleys, where the wind and the tropical birds made music in the daytime, and the stars danced on the superb mountain peaks at night—there would he feather Marie's nest. And it would be some nest.

They would take their time settling. He would put in for a furlough, as soon as he got himself straightened out officially. Then would commence that much belated honeymoon. They would roam the island according to caprice, just flit from place to place, as two birds seeking out the tree in which to build their nest. It would be fun, over there in God's wild—no clang, no jar; only the soft noises of nature. Froggy sniffed, clicked his fingers and wafted another merry "la la!" to the gold and blue skies.

The *Wheeler* was one of those ships gobs call a "home." Down anchor, away liberty party—that was Winnie's way of doing things. He was a great skipper. She anchored at one o'clock that afternoon out in the middle of Apra Harbor; and at one fifteen her steam launch, towing the string of boats containing the liberty party, shoved off for the little town of Piti, a cluster of shacks and hovels with a dilapidated pier and a bathing beach, two miles across the bay.

In Piti a score or more of little brown men, Chamorros, like so many chattering monkeys, beset the mob of white-clad gobs, as they stumbled up out of the boats on to the long, rickety wharf. In a polyglot of English, Spanish and Chamorro they all gabbled at once, each asseverating that he had the fastest Lizzie on the island. A dollar and a half to Agana, the capital, ten miles to the northward, was the fare. The gobs outnumbered the Fords, ten to one, but that made no difference; they piled in, eight, ten, twelve in a car.

In five minutes Froggy was alone on the wharf. He didn't want to go to Agana. In the boat coming over, he had told his shipmates—and told them with force and clearness, for he wanted them to remember—that he was going to hire a small sailboat and spend the afternoon cruising about the island's northern shores. Which was the truth, in part.

AFTER an hour of haggling with native fishermen along the beach, Froggy procured himself a small sailboat. He bought her outright, for thirty-five dollars. She was no bargain. By a freak of coincidence, her name was *Marie*. But the name was all she had in common with his other Marie.

This *Marie* was a sixteen-foot cutter, who had long long since shed her coat of paint, and whose freeboard, gunwales and thwarts were cracked and warped and fast crumbling to decay. Her bottom must have been in a like condition, for she was one-third full of water.

She was rigged with a mast, boom and gaff, all home-made, of bamboo, and carried a sail, or rather a triangular spread of dirty and rotten canvas, patched in a half-dozen places with pieces of various materials—a feed sack, the seat of a pair of overalls, a woman's corset.

Froggy was deeply ashamed of this *Marie*. Never had he sailed in any such vagabond craft. His proud nature revolted, as shoes off, and trousers rolled up, he waded out to her. However, she was the best to be had. She would serve the purpose. Anyhow, this was no time to stand on sentiment. He must get busy; bail her out and get her under way. The afternoon was racing along, and there was much to be accomplished.

Another thing about this *Marie*—she was crazy. No sooner had he poled clear of shallow water and hoisted sail than Froggy found this out. She would do anything he did not want her to do. Oh, yes; with that big patched rag spread out, she moved, and at a good lick too—but not in the direction he wanted her to.

She refused, with the stubbornness of a jackass, she refused to come up into the wind, which was from the north. Froggy wanted to ease over and hug Cabraz Island and the reefs to the north, and thus slip out of the harbor without being seen from the *Wheeler*, she lying about two miles to the west of him; for, although he wanted it known and remembered, that he had gone

for a sail this afternoon, he did not want it ever to be said that Francis Napoleon Laporte had traveled in such uncouth company as this.

But this crazy *Marie* had a mulish head of her own. She wanted to go with the wind, and she went with the wind, Froggy and all the nautical tricks in his lexicon notwithstanding. Duckwise she went waddling, sidewise, stern foremost, straight for the *Wheeler*.

"*Sacre!*" Froggy spat into the wind.

Strive as he would the *Marie* would make nothing to the windward, and rapidly the *Wheeler* loomed larger, nearer. This would never do! In a few minutes all hands would be at the gunboat's rails, yelling, "Oo-oo-oo, look what the frog's got!" And Froggy was sensitive. Not only that. Winnie might see him, and get suspicious. A gob on liberty going to sea in such an old and decayed tub as this was either a lunatic or a very wise man. And Froggy had no hankering to be recalled aboard just now and put through the third degree. He must give the *Wheeler* a wide berth.

But this crazy *Marie* would not do it. Leaning back on the tiller, Froggy held her head up, so that she pointed into the wind, but nothing to windward would she make. She simply flapped her sail at him and continued waddling sidewise over toward the *Wheeler*. Froggy spat and swore and pulled at his mustache. But that didn't help.

He let her go 'till within a mile of the *Wheeler*, then brought her about on the other tack. He was now heading for Piti again. He didn't want to go there either. He wanted to get out of the harbor—to sea. Get out clear of Orote Point—that was the game—and then head her south along the island's western shore. But how? With the wind from the north, and with such a stubborn craft under him—by the head of the illustrious Napoleon, how?

His only hope lay in the oars. So he doused sail and bent to his task. It was a task, with such oars. One was two feet shorter than the other, and had only half a blade; the other had cracked in the middle and was bound round with wire to hold it together.

However, Froggy made the best of it. Pulling easily, so as not to break the bound oar, he worked her slowly to the northward, toward Cabraz Island. It was about high tide, slack water; the tide neither helped nor hindered.

Slowly but steadily he drew away to the northward of the *Wheeler*. The afternoon sped along. The sun hung low over the heights of Orote Peninsula. Another mile to the northward, thought Froggy, as he tugged at the oars, and he could up sail and clear Orote Point, which was now about west-northwest of him, three miles away. He would make it about sunset—if nothing untoward occurred.

If! Something untoward always does occur. Glancing back at the *Wheeler*, now two miles southwest of him, Froggy saw something that caused him to abruptly cease rowing. On top of that he began uttering bad words in good French.

Signal flags were being jerked up and down from both the *Wheeler's* yard-arms. This was being done to attract some one's attention. Whose? There was no other ship in the harbor. Besides the *Marie*, the only boats in sight were a few natives' canoes.

The cat was out of the bag, Froggy concluded. Some hawkeyed quartermaster had trained his glass on the *Marie*, noted and reported that Froggy was aboard her. At any rate it was clear enough to Froggy that he was wanted back aboard. Besides jiggling flags from the yard-arms, the *Wheeler's* signal-boys were flourishing semaphore flags from the bridge-wings. More than that. Now, as he concentrated his gaze on her, Froggy could discern waving arms all along her rails.

"You'se can all go to ——!" snapped Froggy. Not if she fired all her saluting guns in salvo, would he head back to the *Wheeler*. "Come an' get me!" he added, and again bent to the oars.

No boat came in pursuit, however, for the reason that the only power-boat the *Wheeler* had in the water just then was in at Piti, with orders to wait there till sundown for any of the liberty that might be returning aboard. So northward into the wind Foggy worked his little scow unmolested.

His shipmates gave up trying to attract his attention after a while. But they still had their eyes on him—Froggy knew that. He knew that the officer of the deck over there was only awaiting the return of the steam launch from Piti. And therein lay Froggy's hope—to get out to the windward

of Orote Point before that launch returned to the *Wheeler*.

The trouble was, in the heat of his zeal Froggy forgot that one of his oars was cracked. He put a few extra pounds behind one stroke, and the oar broke in the middle.

Following that, for an eternal hour he just sat there, hoping the wind would veer to the east, but hoping in vain. The sun went down over Orote Peninsula. Meanwhile Froggy bailed out his boat with his hat. And while thus occupied it flashed to him that he was thirsty.

That made him swear. Not so much as a bottle of water had he brought. And thirsty! But no wonder. He hadn't had a drink since before leaving the ship, over four hours before. And for dinner he had eaten corned beef and cabbage, very salty corned beef, too.

The idea of thirst left Froggy as abruptly as it had come. In that moment he made a very wonderful discovery. She was moving!—this crazy *Marie*. The *Wheeler* was much farther away than before. He was now out near the end of Cabraz Island, with Orote Point almost dead west of him.

Froggy blinked to the east and blinked to the west and twisted at the points of his mustache. How could it be? Yet somehow it was. There wasn't a ripple in the *Marie's* wake, nor was she displacing any water before her; but just the same she was moving, and moving at a good lick, seaward.

WITH an airy sniff and a snap of his fingers, Froggy chirped—"La la!" The gods were with him! The tide—that was it. The tide had turned, commenced to ebb, and was carrying him to sea.

He sat there gaging his bearing from Orote Point. The northern end of Cabraz Island and Orote Point he knew were in a very nearly east-and-west line. He was still a little inside of that line. Once outside, to seaward of that line, he could up sail and clear Orote Point. If——

The word caught in his throat. No if about it, at that moment Froggy saw the *Wheeler's* launch far across the bay, steaming out from Piti. He stood up on the thwart, one hand on the *Marie's* bamboo mast, his neck stretching, nostrils wide open—every atom of his mercurial make-up aquiver. He watched the launch steam across the bay and go alongside the *Wheeler's* gangway. She remained there a minute or so, then shoved off and came racing out toward the *Marie*.

Swearing fluently in French, Froggy looked first at the high black bluff of Orote Point, then at Cabraz Island. He was dead on the line between them; Orote Point was dead west of him, a mile and a half away. Would she do it?—this crazy little tramp.

With the wind from a little to the west of north, would she, if he hoisted the sail, clear Orote Point, dead west, so that he would fetch up over on the western shore, with the open sea ahead and the wind behind him? Froggy believed she could. But he didn't believe she would. Besides being ashamed of this *Marie*, he had no confidence in her. The only thing he liked about her was her name.

He looked astern. The launch was streaking across the bay like a torpedo. She was less than two miles away. At the speed she was making she would be within hailing distance in not many minutes. Then back to the ship for Froggy, his well thought-out project a fizzle; his hope of meeting Marie tomorrow blasted; his honeymoon once more postponed——

No, sir! Click, went those fingers. "*Sacre!*" Froggy hesitated no longer. No could she, or would she, about it; she'd have to! She'd clear Orote Point, or he'd pile her on the rocks! And with three mighty heaves he hoisted that dirty and rotted big thing of patches, and pushed the boom out over the port gunwale. Then he jumped back in the stern sheets and, leaning back on the tiller, brought up his right hand, fingers spread out, thumb to his nose, little finger pointing at the pursuing steamer.

Heeling over till her lee gunwale was awash, her sail ballooning and drumming in the wind, the *Marie* plowed up the water before her and raced for Orote Point like a hound after a hare. She was between two opposing forces; the tide helping, the wind hindering.

For a few minutes Froggy thought she would clear. Then he thought differently. She wasn't making enough to windward. He could not bring her outside, to seaward of that line between Orote Point and the northern end of Cabraz Island. She would

point into the wind, all right, but would not move in that direction.

She sidled, waddled along obliquely. Orote Point rose before him, black, frowning, forbidding. He was too close! She might clear the bluff—but the rocks, those rocks and rocks, close inshore; Froggy saw them now, like so many black monsters of destruction lurking directly in his path in wait for him.

Nor was the water in there at the base of Orote's towering bluff as friendly as it had looked from offshore a ways. The *Marie* was now rearing, plunging violently; standing on end, heeling over. The water rose about him, curling and licking over, crashing, roaring.

Too close! Too close! Seemed the words were being roared in Froggy's ears. He shouldn't have made the attempt. He should have waited—a minute longer. But it was too late now. She was in it. She would clear—or smash.

If she cleared—the world would be Froggy's oyster. If he won through this boiling turmoil to the other side of Orote and the open sea beyond, then nothing would prevent him from seeing his black-eyed little *Marie* tomorrow afternoon. He knew the steamer wouldn't follow him through that whirlpool. Her coxswain, Oily Peters, wasn't famous for taking chances.

Oily would detour Orote widely. And by the time he brought his launch around to the west of the point, the *Marie* would be scudding southward in the gathering darkness, with the open sea ahead of her and the wind behind. And then, if the steamer did follow, giving her the slip would be but a matter of minutes; for dusk was fast fading into night.

The rest would be most easy. Froggy would simply run south, a ways, along Guam's western shore, eight or ten miles, then anchor for the night. Tomorrow morning he would kick a hole in the *Marie's* bottom, let her sink and good riddance, and then swim ashore. He would hide, up in one of the lofty mountains commanding a view of Apra Harbor, till he saw the *Wheeler* leave for Manila. When she was gone, he would report in at the naval station in Agana.

All beyond that rested with the gods. But Froggy would help the gods all he could. When reporting in he would state that he had gone for a sail the afternoon before and been wrecked. This looked easy enough.

He would simply tell them his mast had snapped, that he had broken an oar, drifted about all night in hope of the tide carrying him in, had finally jumped overboard and swam for it. And how could they prove him a liar? How could they bring a charge of liberty-breaking against a man, when he done everything in his power to get back? They couldn't!

And during his nine years in Uncle Sam's navy, that was the nearest Froggy Laporte ever came to breaking his liberty.

The *Marie* didn't clear Orote Point. And in those few wild moments, tossing up and down in the black shadow of scowling Orote, Froggy knew she wasn't going to clear. He saw that the inward push of the wind was greater that the outward pull of the tide; that his little thing of warped and decayed wood was racing headlong to destruction; that in a few seconds she would be smashed to splinters.

Doom clutched at the very roots of him, as she mounted to the crest of an inrush and, for what seemed many minutes but was only a few seconds, just hung there, high up, as if suspended in air, her bow pointing skyward, her stern end submerged, Froggy and all—Froggy wanted to jump.

He knew that to jump was his only chance; that if he didn't jump—right now!—he would thud to death on the rocks along with his poor little vagabond craft. But he couldn't jump. His motor centers were paralyzed. He was unable to force his muscles to action. He was master of his judgment but not of his will.

Then the wave on which she hung broke beneath her, boosting her stern end upward with a jerk that broke Froggy's grip on the tiller. They parted company, the *Marie* taking her last plunge, Froggy shooting out into space, like a man thrown from a bucking bronco. He had a fleeting glimpse of black rocks and white foam, far below him. Then came the giddiness of falling. Froggy shut his eyes.

SIDE by side in the tiny wheelhouse of the racing steam launch, Oily Peters and his bow man looked at each other with woful faces. What they had just witnessed looked like headlong suicide. At that distance, two miles, Froggy's little craft seemed to have just vanished—

ceased to be. As if Orote's scowling black wall had swallowed her.

Oily was first to recover speech. "Hey, Mack, slip 'er the stuff!" he shouted back to his engineer.

And with her throttle wide open the little forty-footer went streaking across the bay for that point of the bluff into which the *Marie* had plunged. She covered the two miles to Orote Point in ten minutes. Oily then slowed her down and nosed in cautiously.

It took all his combined skill and that of his engineer to jockey the heavy little launch back and forth among those rocks; for, besides the water being turbulent in there, it was now well-nigh dark. While they juggled wheel and throttle, the bow man searched among the rocks and down along the dark base of the bluff.

It was Froggy's white uniform that gave him away They found him stretched out flat on a rock, his legs dangling over the edge, submerged. Why "gave him away?" Because Froggy was not unconscious. He was playing possum.

Following that boost out into space, which the *Marie* had given him before taking her last plunge, Froggy didn't thud on rocks at all. By luck, or fortune, it makes no difference, he simply took a dive. He went down, down, down; then came up again. A few moments of gagging, choking, spluttering, and Froggy had his bearings. He struck out for the nearest rock.

Froggy was resourceful. He had imagination. And sitting astraddle of that rock, watching the lights of the approaching steamer he brought that imagination into play. He hadn't yet fizzled; in his heart still smoldered the hope of meeting Marie at the *Delawanna's* gangway tomorrow afternoon.

Between him and the fulfilment of that hope stood three men. His shipmates on the launch would soon be searching the rocks for him. If he could just lie low, hang on to this rock, half-submerged, till they gave up the search, he might yet put it over.

The tide being on the ebb, the rock on which he was would be out of water in a very few hours; he would have only to slide down and—well, just take a moonlight stroll along the beach, thinking things over. So he played possum.

But it didn't work. His shipmates found him. Of course, after they had hauled him aboard the steamer there was no use playing possum any longer. The thing to do was to recover consciousness and then see what could be done with the steamer's crew. And as soon as Oily had backed his launch out clear of the rocks, Froggy began doing that.

"Run in an' drop me along the beach somewhere, Oily," he pleaded. "Go back aboard and say my boat smashed on the rocks an' you couldn't find me." Proffering a wet and soggy roll of bills, Froggy added: "Three hundred dollars—me honeymoon money. It's all I got left of the clean-up I made in 'Frisco Kelley's a coupla months ago. Run in to the beach an' drop me off an' it's yours. You'se can split it, a hundred each."

That didn't work either. The engineer spat over the side, the bow man grinned. Oily replied:

"Not if you had a million, Frog. Old boy Winnie's orders are to go out and get you and bring you back aboard. And that's what we're gonna do."

Froggy begged and pleaded. Then he cursed at them, in both English and French.

"Youse guys'll be sorry!" he threatened. "Youse'll come around the galley with wrinkles in you bellies lookin' for a handout one o' these days! Then watch me! 'Try an' get it,' is the best you'se'll get from me. Youse are all right when youse are lookin' for somethin'! Yah! Different when some one asks youse for a favor."

"Now wait a minute, Frog," Oily flared up. "A favor is a favor. But Winnie's orders——"

"Be ——!" Froggy snapped him off. "Anyhow," he hastened on, with a click of his fingers, "my liberty ain't up till tomorrow mornin'! Eight o'clock tomorrow mornin', the officer o' the deck said! Where does the old man get that noise—runnin' a guy back ahead of time?"

"Search me, Frog. Unless—" Oily hesitated, giving her a few spokes of the wheel to compensate for the seaward push of the tide—"unless when he saw you, maybe, out there in that scow, he got suspicious. You asked him for transfer to Guam yesterday, you know, and got flopped. Guess he figured you for a miss-the-ship stunt."

"Figure me eye! He's crazy!"

"Ye-ah—like a fox," Oily drawled.

Froggy said no more. The best he could see to do now was return aboard and trust

to the gods. Some time during the night he might find opportunity to slip down the anchor chain and swim ashore. It would be a long chance, though, in this shark-infested water. But sharks wouldn't have deterred Froggy that night—for he was desperate.

THE band was playing, and the *Wheeler's* upper decks were flooded with all the light her dynamos would deliver, when Froggy, wet and bedraggled and forlorn, slouched up the quarter-deck gangway. Some smart-Aleck of a shipmate commenced imitating a croaking frog, and instantly a lot of other smart Alecks took it up.

"Jug-a-rrum, jug-a-rrum, jug-a-rrum," they chorused.

The bandmaster, thinking they were ridiculing his band, became peeved. With much pulling of hair, gnashing of teeth and flourishing of arms he signaled the cornet, bass-horn and slide-trombone players for full blast.

The volume of sound that rose into the night was terrific. It crescendoed to a mighty uproar, that might have been heard for miles and miles, the croaking gobs vying with the snorting musicians till their lungs hurt.

It was just that—a battle of lungs. It waged for five minutes. Then the band quit. Still the mighty chorus of "jug-a-rrums" pulsed on, for five minutes longer, ten, till finally the boatswain's mates succeeded in restoring order.

Through all this Froggy stood before the officer of the deck, a picture of wobegone dejection, humilation, despair— The officer grinned, as he looked him over. When the noise had subsided he said—

"What happened, Laporte?"

"I goes out for a sail, sir," Froggy answered glumly, "an' piles my boat on the rocks, that's all."

The officer laughed. Froggy felt like telling him there was nothing funny about it, but that would have been violating military etiquette."

"Jug-a-rrum," croaked a voice forward.

"Pipe down!" the officer of the deck turned and shouted.

"My liberty wasn't up till tomorrow mornin', sir," Froggy went on. "The coxswain o' the steamer says he was sent out to bring me back, sir."

The officer's face straightened. "Why, yes," he replied. "That was the captain's order. He wants to see you." He added. "Better shift into dry clothes first, though."

"Is that an order, sir? About the dry clothes, I mean."

The officer grinned again. "No; not necessarily. Go just as you are, if you like."

Froggy did. In a few seconds he was down in Winnie's cabin. Here all was topsy-turvy. Trunks and traveling bags, hats, shoes, heaps of clothing, stack of books—all Winnie's belongings were scattered in disorder about the cabin. The spacious and elaborate room now looked like the interior of a second-hand clothing store under the auctioneer's hammer. Over in a corner Winnie stooped over a trunk, which he was packing. He straightened up as Froggy entered.

"Hello, Laporte," he greeted, in a hail-fellow tone. "What happened? Get wet? Say, lad, things turned out fine!"

At that moment Winnie looked like a big overgrown boy. He stepped over and stood grinning down into Froggy's glaring black eyes.

"Remember, lad, what I told you yesterday, about having a request in for shore duty myself? Well, those people in Washington finally took that out of the pigeonhole and approved it. I'm detached to Guam, lad, to command the radio station —communication officer."

Froggy could only stare. What did this have to do with bringing him back to the ship before his liberty had expired? he wondered.

"As I told you, Laporte," Winnie continued, "I couldn't conscientiously transfer you. You see, lad, my main concern is, and always has been, for the men under my command. They come first, always. They may shout their heads off about strong-arm methods, I have yet to see an efficient man-of-war with a dissatisfied crew! That's my creed, lad—keep 'em satisfied. It's the only way to handle 'em. You can't handle 'em through the fear in their hearts. You've got to win' em!"

Winnie stopped. There was a smile in his big gray eyes that went to the roots of Froggy and melted the glare in his eyes into a glow of admiration. He knew in that moment why Winnie was called "the finest skipper in the Navy." He felt it,

something big, splendid, that came from deep down and went to deep down.

"The same logic goes, on a shore station," Winnie added. Then he paused for a few moments; his eyes and brow narrowed in thought. Finally, with a shrug:

"Oh well—a man has to stretch a point now and then. Anyhow, I turn this ship over to our executive officer this evening—she gets a new commanding officer at Manila.

Daylight was dawning for Froggy. "An' you take command of the radio station tomorrow mornin', sir?"

"Yes. And say, Laporte, we've got to give that place a shakedown. I learned this afternoon that the gang over there are all suffering with gastric disturbances. They've been trying to get a ship's cook out here for over three months. They've forgotten what a good feed looks like!"

Froggy saw the light. He straightened up and threw back head and shoulders. His chest swelled and his black eyes flashed with the pride of him. He snapped his fingers.

"I believe like Napoleon, sir. An army marches ——"

"— on its stomach. You're right, lad. We'll show 'em—you and I."

"An' Marie, sir. She's a cute little trick of a frog, sir!"

"I believe you, lad," and Winnie grinned. "But the trouble is," he went on, sobering, "as I say, I've got to stretch a point. As commanding officer of this ship, I can, of course, transfer you to Guam—just before I transfer myself. But what about the crew of this ship? Would it be fair to them, to take away the best ship's cook they've ever had.

Froggy had a come-back to that on the tip of his tongue. And he gloried in the utterance of it.

"They think a whole lot o' me, sir! Yah Not five minutes ago, when I come back half-drowned an' feelin' like the last rose o' summer, they starts yellin' 'jug-a-rum' at me, at the top o' their voices!"

Winnie turned and walked back over to the corner, where he stood grinning down on the partially packed trunk.

"An' then Marie, sir," Froggy added. "You'll never regret takin' a look at that little frog, sir!"

Winnie gulped down the laugh that rose to his throat. With an effort he steadied himself, for Froggy was funny. At length he turned, his eyes blazing.

"Get out of here!" he snapped. "Go forward and pack your bag and hammock!"

Froggy backed toward the door.

"And don't think," Winnie flung after him, "don't think that I wasn't on to that little game of yours this afternoon. If I hadn't sent the boat out after you, that clean record of yours would have been soiled. Get!"

FROGGY got! When he staggered up out of the hatch on the quarter-deck the band was again in full blast. The cornets blared, the clarinets and piccolos squealed and skirled, the slide-trombones ripped and tore. On top of that, as Froggy swaggered forward, his shipmates burst forth again with "jug-a-rrum, jug-a-rrum—" But Froggy scarcely heard them.

In his mind's eye was Marie—his Marie, trim, petite, with hair and eyes as black as his own—the cutest little trick of a frog ever made—standing up at the rail on the promenade deck of the *Delawanna*, screaming down to him in a boat tomorrow afternoon—

"Franceese! Franceese! *Mon* grreat hoosbond!"

THE TOOL OF ALLAH

A Complete Novelette by Georges Surdez

Author of "Black Honor," "Where No Man Hears," etc.

YERO SA, *spahi* of the first class, squatted on the threshold of Lieutenant Morin's room, gazing with somnolent eyes at the play of light over the sanded yard. In red coat and voluminous blue trousers, he appeared like a great brilliant lizard, basking in the high noon sun. A pipe, that had cost a week's pay in the big bazaar at Kayes, wafted to his wide nostrils the pleasing fumes of fine tobacco.

From within the room came the voices of two white men, Yero Sa's chief and a newcomer who, from tomorrow on, would be in command of the Kerouane detachment of *spahis*. Morin was scheduled to go home on leave.

In spite of his assumed calm, Yero Sa was perturbed. He had caught but a glimpse of the new lieutenant; Simier was of a type Yero Sa had never before seen, a raw boned, supercilious fellow, inclined to dandyism, too neat, too correct to be genuine, in Yero's opinion. He was indeed unlike Morin, a long-legged Eastern Frenchman, who had apparently been created for the sole purpose of leading light cavalry in Africa.

Yesterday, at the five o'clock roll call, Morin had spoken a few words of farewell. Yero Sa, with a strange clutching at his throat, had turned to see moisture on the black cheeks of Duga Kante, the veteran sergeant. Morin had led the detachment three years, and was going away. Many times, when a white man went on leave, he never returned. Yero Sa, nearing his twenty-sixth birthday, was feeling his first keen chagrin.

"Yeh," grunted Yero Sa, pessimistically, "maybe he won't come back."

Came the sound of iron lids clanging shut on tin boxes, cracking through his heart with a funeral peal. There was a dreadful finality in the locking of trunks. From the stables appeared Morin's black horse led by Diumu, the groom, followed by five mounted *spahis*, whose time of service was expired, and who were fortunate enough to compose Morin's escort to Kayes. These men halted before the veranda steps.

The last moment was at hand.

Yero Sa, who spoke French better than others in the detachment, had claimed the last privilege; to say something to Morin, on behalf of the men. He stood up when he heard the click of spurs on the board floor. His hand to his forehead, he allowed the two officers to go out, then followed.

Morin was speaking to Simier. Yero Sa waited respectfully until he had finished, then, heels together, he spoke:

"Lieutenant, men say they wait for thee. Come back soon. The *spahis* here without thee are birds without wings, children without mothers. We must ride and fight together again."

Morin wrinkled his brows. His nose twitched.

"Yero Sa, tell the men that I'll come back. Six months, maybe, and we ride

together again." He thrust out his hand. "Good-by, Yero Sa."

There were many things Yero Sa had been asked to say. He forgot them before the outstretched hand.

Morin gained the saddle, then turned to Simier.

"Lieutenant Simier, I recommend Yero Sa to you. He's a good *spahi*. In line for stripes and a medal."

"All right, old man. Got everything you need?"

Morin nodded, and rode away.

Yero Sa watched him until he had passed the gate, and was lost in the lifting dust.

"*Spahi!*"

Yero Sa faced Simier in amazement. Morin had never spoken so, had never glanced at a him as if he were a stick of wood instead of a living man.

"*Spahi*, get back to thy lines. And don't come here again unless on duty. By the way, thou art wearing the red burnoose here in town, which is against orders. If I see this again, thou'lt be punished. Understood? Good."

Stupefied, Yero Sa sought for words. He had worn the red burnoose to honor Morin, although it was meant only for parade. And formerly he had been allowed to loaf about the veranda when he pleased. Having followed Morin's fortune for more than thirty months, he had been a privileged character. But he now perceived that the happy days were gone. He saluted punctiliously, pivoted and walked away.

Some distance off, he took the pipe from the pocket where he had concealed it during his speech. Once again, his eyes were somnolent. But many new thoughts revolved in his head.

Simier did not like him. Very well, he would not like Simier. There were matters that had gone overlong unattended, because of respect for Morin, and fear of causing him annoyance. These matters could now be settled.

Leisurely he strolled to the *spahi* lines, where the men were grouped before their shacks, awaiting him.

"He has gone," Yero Sa announced, "but he will come back in a few moons."

"And didst thou speak to the new lieutenant? What has he to say to us?" asked Sergeant Duga Kante.

"Nothing. Only that we must not go near his veranda, and we can not wear the red burnoose."

He explained what had occurred.

"He is new," Kante declared gravely, "and must learn to know us. They are all alike at the beginning. After a few combats, it will be different."

Yero Sa grunted indignant disbelief.

"Was *our* lieutenant ever like that?"

"No," admitted Kante, "but the new man is an officer, and *our* white man would want us to obey him."

Yero Sa assented without conviction. He sat down before his shack. One of his three wives brought him food. In the anxiety over Morin's departure, he had forgotten to eat.

"Hear, Kante," he resumed. "Now we can settle with the *dioulas*."

The *dioulas*, the merchants of the Sudan, are a money-greedy ilk. General traders, horse dealers and often slave dealers, it is they who bring into the Sudan salt, which comes to Timbuktu from the mines of the great desert.

The French provided the *spahis* with the necessities of life, and even a few luxuries, such as kola nuts and tobacco, besides paying one franc thirty centimes to privates each day, and higher amounts to non-coms. But it must be mentioned that the *spahis* were married men, many of them twice or thrice. These wives needed gorgeous cloths, silk kerchiefs, gold ornaments and, above all else, perfume.

Lacking these, the wives were dissatisfied. And a dissatisfied harem makes an unhappy *spahi*. Hence the *dioulas*, who sold whatever was wanted, from cheap blue guinea cloth of the commonest sort, to the splendid red calico, finely wrought gold pins from the coast, eau de Cologne, and the glass beads indispensable in the manufacture of certain articles of wear of Central African women.

Kerouane had but a few years before been evacuated by the Malinke emperor, Samory. Looming on a high hill, the massive red clay ramparts dominated the surrounding bush, through which the blue Milo River wound. During the fighting the nearby villages had been laid waste. Kerouane was isolated. The *dioulas*, lacking competition, could set whatever price they wished. They had formed a sort of union, charging identically exorbitant prices. As a result, the *spahis* were in a perpetual

state of financial distress.

Morin had taken a hand, made out a list of prices fair to both parties. But since the news of his intended departure had leaked out into the native town, the prices had gone up again.

Yero Sa had long ago been elected by unanimous opinion to the post of leader against the *dioulas*. Now that Morin was gone he must take action or lose prestige.

And so he spoke at length to the group.

AS HE developed his plan the *spahis* first gasped, then grinned. It was a common saying among them that to trick a *dioula* is as easy as to fly like a crow. The recognized chief of the *dioulas* in Kerouane was Mohammed Kabarta, a gaunt, light-chocolate individual, standing seven or eight inches above six feet in his sandals, and claiming to possess cleverness more unusual than his height.

But Yero Sa's plan was worthy of him. The *spahi* entered his shack and was gone for several minutes. When he reappeared, he was naked, save for a dingy loin-cloth, and a string of amulets about his neck. Before the approving eyes of his comrades, he struck a pose. A gleeful shout greeted him.

"Yo, Yero Sa!" declared Kante, "humble and meek captive, thou art."

"Would Mohammed, the *dioula*, father of pigs and a son of dogs, know me thus?"

Duga Kante scratched his thigh musingly. The African negro, when puzzled, does not reach for his skull as a white man does. His fingers wander down to his thigh. This method, peculiar as it may seem, often brings results. His thigh duly scratched, Kante spoke:

"Had I not seen thee enter the hut, I would but glance and say, 'This man looks somewhat like Yero Sa, but he surely is not; he could never be a *spahi*.' "

"My trick will be good, then," said Yero Sa. "Do thy part now, Kante."

The sergeant took a rope, looped at one end, which he slipped around the *spahi's* neck, keeping the other end in his right hand. He thrust Yero Sa forward with pretended roughness.

"Go on, camel's son!" he ordered.

Followed by six *spahis*, the two set out for Mohammed Kabarta's establishment.

On a side street, they halted before a two storied house of brown earth. There, they hesitated briefly before a narrow panel of wood, the door, criss-crossed with iron bands—the *dioula* evidently fearing thieves. Kante pounded upon the planking with his fist. The door opened, revealing a youth, Mohammed's servant.

"Thy master, the *dioula*—" asked Duga Kante.

"Follow me, warriors," replied the boy.

He led the way, through a winding hall into an open yard, and across to another building, a long mud-brick structure, boasting a door twice as wide as that opening upon the street.

This was Mohammed's store. The walls were lined with suspended objects, rows of barrels stretched into the gloomy corners, piles of packing cases loomed high. A smell of dust, grease and spices caught at the throat.

The *dioula* stood in the center of the floor, near a suspended pair of scales, weighing produce.

"Salute to thee," Kante greeted.

"Salute to thee, *spahi*, and to all," replied Kabarta, abandoning his task and wiping his hand on a rag. "What is it you wish to buy, today?"

"We come not to buy, but to sell," Kante informed him, importantly. "We wish to sell this man—" he indicated Yero Sa—"he is our captive. We bought him from a passing caravan lately to do low work about our quarters. We want to get rid of him, because we are going away from Kerouane to fight."

"Uh!" Mohammed voiced surprize.

He came closer to Yero Sa, and scanned the captive slowly, not as one man looks at another, but as a buyer looks at a purchase. With swift deft fingers he felt Yero Sa from skull to heels, dug his hand into the flesh, rapped him, tapped him, pried his jaws open and tugged at the strong teeth. This done, he shook his head in depreciation.

"Tricked! You *spahis* were tricked in buying a poor man. He is thin, sickly——"

Although dwarfed by the elongated Mohammed, Yero was well built, not much under six feet. He was known to be vain about his physical perfection, and gentle amusement was manifested on the faces of the *spahis* when Mohammed spoke.

"Buyer's speech," qualified Kante. "See, he is very strong, not sickly. He will never be sick. I can see in thy face, Mohammed

the *dioula*, that thou dost wish to buy him. How much?"

"That is for thee to say—thou art selling," reminded the *dioula* suavely.

"I want—" Kante in his turn ran his palms lingeringly over the rounded muscles of Yero Sa's torso, with little exclamations of admiration—"seven hundred francs would be a fair price."

Mohammed grinned contemptuous amusement, scoffed loudly at the price.

"Seven hundred francs—for seven hundred francs, one hundred and forty large silver pieces, I bought three captives but a year ago, in this very store."

"A year ago—" Kante gestured in dismissal. "A year ago is not today. A year ago Samory was selling captives close to here, very cheaply, by the hundred, to all who would buy. They cost him nothing. The white men are here now, and will not allow free men to be made captives. Therefore have prices increased, and will increase still more before long."

In this Kante was right.

The price of captives would rise higher as time went on. Finding slavery a deeply rooted institution in the Sudan—the chief base of exchange, the main article of commerce—the French had not abolished it at one blow. They allowed the owners of captives to keep the men held when they arrived, and permitted traffic of slaves within limits.

The Republic was content to forbid the enslaving of other men, and trusted to the future to completely wipe out the custom. But, as the nation which gave the world the "Rights of Man," France could not tolerate the word "slave." Therefore, it was promptly prohibited, and men held in bondage were called captives. Hypocritical, but a matter of wise policy.

Mohammed clucked his tongue and pondered.

"Two hundred francs silver, or three hundred francs merchandise," he offered finally. "That is my best price."

"Six hundred and fifty," coaxed Kante. "But a week ago, a captive brought that in open market. And he was no longer young."

"At that price, Sergeant," Mohammed asserted, "I will *sell* thee as many captives as thou dost wish. Better men, too."

The discussion lasted over an hour, until Mohammed agreed to pay four hundred francs in silver, or five hundred in goods.

"At that price, *spahis*, I'm making you gifts," he concluded, and indicated the merchandise. "Pick out what you want."

Yero Sa saw with intense pleasure the raid upon the bales of cloth, the packing cases, the barrels. Mohammed, probably feeling that he had made a good bargain, was more generous than usual. When the *spahis* left the store, they staggered under their acquisitions.

Mohammed escorted them to the door, took leave of them, and returned to face Yero Sa.

"Thy name, man?"

"Ono, Master."

"Ono, thou'lt not be with me long. I know of a man who will pay much more than I just gave for thee. Canst thou handle a blade?"

Yero Sa, who had a wrist of steel and a deep knowledge of saber play, repressed a grin.

"No, my Master."

"Thou'lt be taught," assured Mohammed. "Wait here, I go but to order food for thee, and a place to sleep."

Alone, Yero Sa looked about him. There was no need to prolong the comedy. Mohammed had been made to repay in part what he had filched from the *spahis* through long months. Yero Sa would escape, gain the barracks, put on his uniform. If Mohammed went to the new lieutenant with his tale, he stood a good chance of being thrown out bodily by the sullen tempered Simier.

With Morin, things would have been different. Morin would have investigated carefully, Yero Sa would have been placed in the guard house, and the lieutenant would have laughed about the affair with his white friends. But Simier did not seem to be able to laugh. Truly, Mohammed Kabarta had best stay away from the white officer.

Yero Sa, therefore, looked about him for a way of escape. The windows were narrow, and too high to be easily reached. The door was open, but he might meet Mohammed. With several packing cases, he formed a footing to reach the nearest opening, and perceived, with satisfaction that he could slip through with a little effort. After that, a leap to the surrounding wall, a quick run through the streets——

He laid both hands on the ledge.

CAME Mohammed Kabarta's voice, soft, good natured.

"*Spahi*, there are three men beneath that window, with big clubs. I would not like to harm my captive."

Yero Sa leaped back into the room.

"So, thou dost know me, Mohammed?"

"It seems that I do, Yero Sa, does it not? How foolish you *spahis* are! Being white man's slaves makes you so."

"Be silent about this," the pseudocaptive proposed, "and thou'lt be repaid fully. I should have known better."

"I have thee, I hold thee," announced Mohammed.

"Thou wouldst steal a white man's soldier?"

"Steal? I steal nothing. I have paid dearly for thee."

Yero Sa was a man of action. Mohammed being between him and the door, the *spahi* rushed at the *dioula*. But the merchant avoided him with a long nimble stride. At the same time, four negroes, all big and muscular, came into the store, swinging large clubs. Behind them a youth carried a coil of rope.

"Be peaceful, Yero Sa," advised Mohammed Kabarta. "I will secure thee and send thee away tonight."

"Where?"

"East, north—somewhere. What matter? I will be paid a good price for a man fine enough to be a *spahi*, won't I?"

Yero Sa regarded the four armed men doubtfully. Then, anger sweeping him again, he rushed to the attack.

"Don't harm him," cautioned Mohammed, fearing for his property.

The four blacks, themselves captives, tossed the clubs away, and met Yero Sa. They were strong, but slow compared with the *spahi*, whom long hours of practice with the saber had made agile.

Yero Sa tumbled them one after another, craftily working toward the clubs. He darted forward, gained one of the heavy weapons, and with this, gave a better account of himself. He found time to deal Mohammed a rap on the ribs that folded the *dioula* into a limp heap. But not for long.

Mohammed picked himself up, rubbing his side.

"Rest a while," he invited his men, who had abandoned the attack, but remained resolutely before the door. "I will reason with him."

"Talk, *dioula*," assented Yero Sa impatiently. "But say only that I will be allowed to go free. The rest is useless speech."

Kabarta sat down on a packing case.

"Thy trick failed. How would the *spahis* have had enough money left to buy a captive, after spending their pay here? And, as thou and Kante are ever together, I looked for thee, and recognized thee. To make sure, I asked concerning the saber play. Thou didst say that the blade was unknown to thee!

"And all the time, I was seeing the swelling on thy arm, that can be brought out by nothing but saber play." He indicated Yero Sa's right arm, where the fencer's muscles bulged above the elbow. "I tell this, not to boast, but to show that, knowing enough to prevent thee from playing a trick on me, I will know enough to keep thee a captive, eh?"

For reply, Yero Sa ran toward the door.

Mohammed allowed his men to pick up their clubs, and a Homeric struggle was engaged. Tinware cascaded noisily, bundles collapsed, bales were ripped open. Yero Sa fought like a maniac. Bringing down his club on arms and shoulders, he soon disabled two men.

He would probably have made the door and escaped, had not the young servant taken a hand in the fight. The boy arranged the rope in a wide loop behind Yero Sa and waited until the *spahi*, leaping away from a swinging stick, stepped into it. Then he tugged quickly.

Yero Sa fell, crashed with all his weight on the earth floor, the breath knocked out of him. Two men kneeled upon his back, pinioned his arms securely. Then, Yero Sa was rolled over, to face Mohammed.

"*Dioula* pig!" he muttered. "Wait until the white man hears of this!"

"Thou'lt be gone in the morning. I have never seen Yero Sa, the *spahi*. What can the white man say?"

"I will escape."

"There is a way to tame unruly captives," Mohammed asserted.

Yero Sa quivered. He knew what Mohammed Kabarta meant.

"If thou dost that to me, a free man, I'll strangle thee some day."

"If Allah wills," agreed the *dioula*.

He spoke to his men, who left the room,

to return soon with an iron stove filled with charcoal. This was lighted, and iron rods placed to heat.

Mute, Yero Sa watched the metal grow red, then bluish, then white. The young servant picked up one of the rods and approached. The *spahi*, seeing Mohammed's eyes upon him, set his face. The youth bent close.

Below his collar bone, Yero Sa felt an excruciating pain, as the flesh sizzled beneath the hot iron. The sickening smell of burning flesh dominated the varied odors of the store.

The boy changed irons. The one he had first used had cooled with the first rush of blood. Patiently, he kept on at the gruesome task, while Yero Sa, grinding his teeth, glared at the *dioula*, and twisted in unrestrainable convulsions.

Mohammed reached for a cola nut in an open sack, nibbled and chewed, unconcerned. At last the hole through Yero Sa's left shoulder was pierced. Mohammed, rising, explored among boxes in the rear of the store, and came back with a white paste on his fingers. This he applied to the wound, ramming it through with an ivory rod. The pain dwindled.

The servant then procured a slender iron chain, with a sort of metal disc at one extremity. This was pushed through the hole and drawn out from the rear.

With a swift gesture, the boy severed Yero Sa's bonds. The *spahi* rose to his feet. One of the captives grasped the free end of the chain. It was useless to struggle. Yero Sa knew that he could not escape now. This chain would be welded to iron rings wherever he went. On the march, it would be fastened to a mounted man's saddle, or to the waist of a trusted captive. The French, of course, would not tolerate the practice. But Mohammed would not send him where there were Frenchmen.

"I'll remember this forever, *dioula*," the *spahi* said calmly.

"What has been done can not be undone," Mohammed declared. "I will feed thee well before the march thou wilt have tonight."

"I will not eat thy food."

"There will be no other until tomorrow at noon. The caravan feeds the captives but once a day."

"I will wait until a man grants me food, and not a pig."

"From a captive much can be heard without anger," concluded Kabarta.

And Yero Sa was led away.

MIDNIGHT came.

The *spahis* gathered around the fires, awaiting Yero Sa's return, grew anxious. Something must have gone wrong. Perhaps, Mohammed Kabarta had taken him to the lieutenant after discovering who he was. Kante was the most perturbed. In spite of the orders to avoid the officer's quarters, he sought out Diumu, Simier's boy, who assured him that nothing unusual had occurred that evening.

"I'll ride about town and see," Kante suggested to the others. "He may be out on the streets somewhere."

What Yero Sa could be doing on the streets at the late hour, he could not have explained, but he needed action to relieve his uneasiness. Two others decided to accompany him, while the rest turned in for the night, save the men on guard. The horses were saddled, and the trio set out in the moonlight.

In the deserted streets the animals' hoofs rang noisily. They searched, without success, for the best part of an hour, then decided to go to Mohammed Kabarta, and seek the truth. The blame was passed around, and finally fastened on the absent man's shoulders.

"No matter who is to blame," Kante cut short soberly, "Yero Sa must be helped."

Kante hesitated long before he pounded on the narrow door. The shuffling of bare feet along the hall, and the panel opened, revealing the servant boy, holding a torch high, his eyes heavy with sleep.

"Thy master—at once!" ordered Kante.

"This late? No—" the boy tried to close the door, but Kante fell upon him from above and overwhelmed him.

The torch rolled aside, extinguished.

Kante scrambled to his feet, pulling the shaking servant with him. Baring a few inches of saber, he made him understand that further delay might prove dangerous. The sergeant knew that he might lose his stripes for this act of violence against the servant of an esteemed trader.

"You hold this boy," Kante suggested, "I'll go in and find the *dioula*."

He walked down the hall, feeling the wall with his outstretched hand, until he found a narrow stairway. Twenty-eight steps, and

he was on the upper floor. A copper lamp burned in a bracket; Kante grasped it, and walked through other rooms, calling out the *dioula's* name loudly.

At length, the tall trader stood before him, half naked, surprized, but apparently not angry.

"What has been done with the captive?" Kante challenged.

"Is it thy affair?"

Kante twined his fingers about the hilt of his heavy saber.

"Take me to him, Mohammed Kabarta. I must see him."

"He's gone."

"Where?"

"I sold him at sundown to a caravan bound east. Thou'lt find him many miles from here."

"Did he leave without protest?"

"What right has a captive to protest? Go, and let me sleep."

Mohammed was a liar of note, even among a breed famed for skilful lying. But Kante knew that a caravan had left Kerouane for the east that evening, to profit by the full moon, and take advantage of the cool of the night.

Kante was puzzled. Why should Yero Sa have allowed himself to be resold, thereby putting the money back into the *dioula's* coffers? Why, unless he had found it impossible to escape from Mohammed's house, and thought to take advantage of the moving caravan?

Mohammed led the way to the street, and bade the three *spahis* good night. As they rode away, they heard the shrill yells of the youth, being beaten for allowing strangers to invade the house.

Kante's comrades agreed with him that it was best to follow the caravan. As they were about to pass into the open country, a *tirailleur* stood up suddenly in the doorway, bayonet leveled.

"Mobti," Kante said, the password for the night. As he spoke, he urged his mount forward, as did the others. The sharp metallic sliding of a rifle breech halted them.

"What now?" grumbled Kante. "Dost thou know me? I'm Sergeant Duga Kante, of the Spahis."

"The new lieutenant gave orders that no *spahi* be allowed out after dark to go to the villages."

Kante knew better than to argue with a *tirailleur* on duty. He wheeled his horse, and led his men along the wall to the next gate, hoping for a better reception. This time, the trio had to hurry off to avoid arrest, for a white non-com of *tirailleurs* was in command of that post.

"No use trying to pass the gates," Kante concluded.

"Yero Sa will have to come back as best he can."

At roll call the next morning, the names were answered one by one until the dreaded moment came.

"Yero Sa!" Kante called out firmly.

No answer. The sergeant repeated the name three times, then went on with the rest of the list. Simier had noted Yero Sa's absence by a lift of the eyebrows.

"Where's Yero Sa?" he asked, when the sergeant had finished the call.

Kante, who feared that Yero Sa might appear any moment, and tell a tale conflicting with his own, evaded the question.

"I don't know, Lieutenant."

"We leave Kerouane to-day, sergeant," Simier said sharply. "Get everything ready."

"Where do we go?" asked Kante.

Simier started at the question, coming from an inferior. Then, realizing that this was manifestly another privilege granted to the black troopers by Morin, answered:

"The detachment is transfered to Fort Hugueny, at Timbuktu. In three days, if Yero Sa does not turn up, I'll have to report him as a deserter. This detachment will be run like cavalry, from now on."

"About Yero Sa, I must say—" began Kante.

"Nothing. Be silent. The fact is evident. Thou'lt learn not to argue with me, Sergeant. Thy first eight days in Timbuktu will be spent in barracks. Understood? Good."

"Yes, Lieutenant."

Three hours later, the *spahis* under Simier were on the road to Timbuktu. These quick shifts were customary, but Kante could not help thinking that this was unfortunate. Yero Sa's wives and children wondered and lamented, but followed the outfit north, feeling sure that some time Yero Sa would return to his uniform.

Three days passed, four, a week. Timbuktu was reached. Simier, not sorry to show up Morin's "pet," marked Yero Sa down as a deserter. The report was transmitted to Kayes, where his name being

incorporated in a long list, Yero Sa was condemned by default to be shot.

His eight days of arrest over, Kante wandered about Timbuktu, asked many questions, spent his free time near the *dioula* caravans from every part of the Sudan. But Yero Sa's description tallied with that of many other blacks, and he could learn nothing.

"RUN, good-for-nothing, run!"

And Yero Sa ran. Long since he had learned the tireless gait of the captive, who must keep up or die.

The slender chain was tied to the saddle girth of a white camel. On this camel rode Baba, his master. Baba was far from satisfied with Yero Sa, whom he had fruitlessly dragged about for months, from Kerouane to the Kanem, by Odienne, Sikosso and Zinder. Mohammed Kabarta was not above tricking a fellow *dioula*. The farther away from the French possessions that Baba took his captive, the less was the amount offered for him.

In Zinder, Baba had attempted to sell Yero Sa to Ahmadou, sultan of the region, who was marshaling his troops to resist the French. Baba, who knew the truth from Mohammed, extolled Yero Sa's military qualities, and Ahmadou had been tempted to purchase him as an instructor. At the last minute, he recalled the fidelity of the blacks to their white chiefs, and flatly refused to take Yero Sa were he offered as a gift.

Baba was angered. Yero Sa would long remember that day. He had been spread-cagled on the ground, pegged securely, then whipped until he lost consciousness. Across his back were scars that would stay with him always, and in his soul a hatred that would endure with the whip marks.

The long captivity had told on the *spahi*. He was thin, sickly, the muscles ridging the skin like strings. The daily trot beside the camel, months on end, had worn down even his great strength. And he suffered from a graver ailment—homesickness. He longed for the barracks, for the companionship of the *spahis*, for his horse.

Other captives with the caravan were well fed, well treated, for they had a market value. But who would buy a captive who must be kept chained? Being worth nothing, save as a man to be tortured for amusement, Yero Sa was not given much to eat. *Fonio* grains, which lack nourishing quality, a few handfuls of moldy rice, composed his diet. Meat he had not tasted since the Sultan of Zinder refused to buy him.

Usually, when Baba looked down into his face, he found the strength to scowl, to mutter threats. But he was nearing the end of his resistance. To-day, he ran forward without a word, his face blank, his mind intent solely on keeping from falling.

"Yeh, good-for-nothing," repeated Baba, "thou dost not speak boldly today."

He brought down the lash with impartiality—on the camel's head and across Yero's back. The captives behind and the armed men of the escort laughed loudly. Yero Sa, dazed, his stomach floating with nausea, struggled against a desire to plead for mercy. Pride and physical suffering conflicted. He tightened his jaws, and ran on.

As in a dream, he saw the clumps of trees, the waving grass, the red surface of the road unwinding beneath his pounding feet. Then with a suddenness that threw him violently aside, the camel stopped. His shoulder aching, Yero Sa leaned against the beast's sweating, heaving flank, grateful for the support.

The camel twisted his long neck, and turned its ugly head toward him. The split muzzle parted in amusement, or so it seemed to Yero Sa, and the fetid breath completed his misery. Scarcely knowing where he was, he only knew that he could rest, that his aching muscles could relax.

Presently, he became aware of strange movements among the armed guards that Baba had hired at Zinder. The members of this mercenary escort within Yero Sa's vision were fingering their long rifles nervously. They stared toward the north, and Yero Sa sought for the cause of the perturbation.

But his chain was too short to allow him to circle the camel, and, when he tried to slide between the long, slender legs, a hoof pressed on his bare toes with malign precision. Once again the camel turned toward Yero Sa and blew its disgusting breath in his face.

Baba's voice, strained, anxious, sounded from above—

"What do they want?"

"Thy goods," answered the chief of the guards, with a short laugh. "We are few, they are many. It would be best to meet

peaceably and let them have what they want rather than fight."

Baba hesitated before he spoke:

"I pay you warriors to protect me," he said. "Fight!"

The leader of the guards rested his gun across his saddle and fired in the general direction of the strangers. His men lifted their rifles, and fired also. Yero Sa, who had seen many combats, was forced to smile. It was Baba's custom to hire defenders as he went, instead of carrying with him men who must be paid even when not working. Yero Sa knew the folly of this principle. So, now, he was not surprized when the guards did not fight long.

"Baba, thy pay is small. Our fighting also will be small. We have fired our guns. Allah be with thee. Farewell," the chief of the escort remarked.

In spite of Baba's protestations, he led his men away, taking the trail toward Zinder.

To Yero Sa, Baba's lamentations were music. Baba would lose his goods. Perhaps, he would be slain. Yero Sa would change masters, but any change would be for the better. His curiosity won over his customary aloofness from the other captives.

"Eh, thou—what sort of men are these coming this way?" he shouted to a stout fellow, kneeling, his face hidden in his arms. "I can not see them. This —— of a camel is in my way."

The captive did not reply, but sank lower to the ground, shivering. To Yero Sa's surprize, it was Baba who answered, forgetting his position as master.

"Tebbous, they are Tebbous! The ——'s men, thieves, robbers, Allah's curse on the guards—I'll lose my goods—I'll be killed."

Tebbous! Yero Sa had heard of them. They were blacks, but dressed and fought like the white Tuaregs. They roamed somewhere in that mysterious land north of the Chad, where also existed that fabulous animal, the *Abou Karn*, which was said to be as large as an elephant, and with but a single horn, and that in the center of his head. Yero Sa, though he was a white man's soldier, was awed.

Strangely enough, since the few shots fired by the guards, not a single gun had sounded. Evidently the Tebbous had no rifles. Why had the guards fled? Because of the arrows which fell about? At that moment, one of the shafts struck the captive who had not answered his question. It did not more than graze his arm, and fell clattering to the ground. The man looked up, chattered excitedly at his escape, reached for the scratch, and then fell face forward—dead.

"Poison," decided Yero Sa.

He was borne down by a sudden move of the camel. The trader had made his beast kneel, and was taking shelter behind it from the arrows. Baba's face was gray with fear.

Now, by rising slightly, Yero Sa could see over the saddle.

He realized in time that the Tebbous could not know of his liking for them. They fired at his head. He ducked, but not until Baba had slapped him in the face, and sharply ordered him to lower his head.

Yero Sa felt the bruised spot where Baba's hand had struck. His first reaction was to lie quiet and obey. The habit of months is not forgotten in a minute. Yero had lost the quick resentment of insults—he had been compelled to leave many unavenged.

But then, he was aware of Baba's eyes, suddenly fearful, upon him. Here was the *dioula* without guards, Baba who had ordered him whipped, who had spat upon him. Baba must have read his thoughts in his eyes, for he seemed to prefer the arrows to the twitching hands of Yero Sa. He leaped quickly, dived over his mount, knowing that the chain would keep his captive from following.

Yero Sa reached out and clasped his fingers around a bare ankle. Contact with the flesh of his enemy awoke the slumbering strength that he had thought gone. In one move, he dragged Baba to his side. Roughly, he laid him on his back, and knelt upon his chest.

Long ago, Yero Sa had desired a young girl, whose father wanted a great deal of money before he would consent to the marriage. Yero Sa had saved, had borrowed, for over a year, until he could count out the silver pieces. That day, he had thought that never again would he experience such happiness. Yet the past faded into nothingness before this single moment with Baba.

He tightened his hands around the throat of the *dioula*, until the trader's eyes, bloodshot and enormous, swelled out of their sockets. Then, he allowed him to regain

his breath and plead for life. This he repeated again. On Baba's coarse features, he noted every shade of fear, of agony.

Yero Sa was as if transported into heaven. But his long thumbs pressed too hard, the flesh formed greasy ridges between his fingers, and the *dioula* lay still. With a grunt of satisfaction, Yero Sa released the neck. Baba, although quite dead, coughed, his chest rumbled. The imprisoned air was escaping.

With trembling fingers, Yero Sa untied the chain from the saddle, and gained his feet.

At his side, some one spoke, in a language he could not understand.

Yero turned, and faced a Tebbou. The man looked gigantic in the dark *gandoura*. His face was veiled, but the eyes were those of a negro. From his left arm hung a shield of elephant hide, and, dangling from a wide strap slung over the shoulder, a long sword hung.

"I do not understand thy speech, O, Tebbou," Yero Sa said in the *dioula* dialect, understood by the Sudanese.

"I said that I have seen many killings," replied the Tebbou, in the same tongue, "but never one so good as thine; truly, it was worthy of a free man, captive."

"I was a warrior," declared Yero Sa, proudly, "until the *dioulas* tricked me."

"A warrior? What people? Where from?"

"From over the great river," said Yero Sa. "I'm a Toucouleur." He fingered the chain. "I own myself thy captive, Tebbou. There is no need of the chain."

The Tebbou was joined by others to whom he spoke. After a consultation he addressed Yero Sa.

"We say: If thou dost treat thy masters thus, thou art a free man. Come with the Tebbous if thou dost wish, but as a free man, not a captive."

This was talk that Yero could understand. He had been sickened by the commercial prattle of the *dioulas*.

"I must get rid of the chain," he declared. "Quick!"

Baba's blacksmith had escaped the arrows. He brought his tools, his iron stove. The chain was severed at both ends, close to the body. The flesh had tightened around the links, and the iron was imbedded in live tissues. But Yero Sa took the end in both hands, and with a single jerk, pulled the chain out. Blood drenched his chest. The acute pain racked him. He did not groan, his eyes did not flicker. Casually, he tossed the chain away. The Tebbous remained silent.

Yero Sa was free, and among friends.

UNDER Simier, the detachment had seen much service on the desert border. Morin had not come back. Vague rumors circulated in the barracks to the effect that the white man had become a captain in France, and would never return to the Sudan.

Gradually, the loyalty that the *spahis* had given Morin, through affection, they transferred to Simier, through admiration and pride in their leader.

Simier, who lacked the good humor of Morin, who was morose, taciturn, and never spoke unless compelled to by the obligations of his rank, had shown cold courage, a calculating brain on the field. He weighed chances of a situation without error. His disdain of danger was proverbial, as was his horsemanship.

In barracks, he remained a martinet. But in battle, the *spahis* had repeatedly seen him risk his life to save one of their number. Very soon, the riders knew that Simier was just; if he punished promptly, he rewarded just as easily.

For Kante, he had obtained the Legion of Honor. Several privates had him to thank for the yellow and green ribbon of the *Médaille Militaire*. In Timbuktu, the Simier detachment had the reputation of being the best equipped, the best led.

One afternoon, fourteen months after the transfer to Timbuktu, Kante, on the vast sandy plain north of the city, was instructing recruits recently accepted into service. His patience was sorely tried, for many of these new men had served in native armies against the French, where they had learned certain things not acceptable in regular cavalry.

Every one knows that it is harder to make a man forget a thing than to teach him. The recruits sawed at the bits, slapped their mounts' flanks with the stirrups, and did not apparently possess sufficient intelligence to grasp the first principle of saber work.

Kante swore, pleaded and, after assuring himself that there was no white officer within sight, struck out.

A gathering of interested natives lined a rise of sand, jeering and applauding in turn.

One of the spectators had drawn nearer than the others, and watched carefully the clumsy evolutions of the recruits, commenting occasionally in an audible voice. Kante became irritated, and several times ordered the man to move away.

His work for the day over, Kante, not in the best of moods, was following his charges toward the walls of Timbuktu. He became aware that his annoyer was still near, keeping up step for step. Suspecting an attempt to ridicule him, the sergeant reined his horse, and waited for the stranger to approach.

"I have warned thee to stay away," he said. "I tell thee again for the last time."

"Then," asked the other, "then, what wilt thou do, Duga Kante?"

Kante could scarcely believe his ears. This could not be Yero Sa, this man in flowing blue garments, with the veil over his face, and the Targui saddle and arms. Forgetting his recruits, he remained motionless, staring at the eyes peering at him through the slit between turban and *litham*.

"Yero Sa?" he asked, doubtfully.

"Yero Sa, come back to the *spahis*."

Seeing the man he had thought dead not only alive, but free and obviously prosperous, Kante's immediate reaction was anger. He and Yero Sa had been good friends. It was unbelievable that the *spahi* should not have sent him news before.

"Where hast thou been all this time?" he demanded sharply.

"I come from Kanem, in the east," Yero Sa informed him. "I was with the Tebbous."

Yero Sa told his story.

After killing Baba, Yero Sa had joined the Tebbous. He did not dare to return immediately through the region he had crossed as a slave. He might have been recognized and seized. Besides, life with the Tebbous was to his liking. He fought with them against various enemies for several months. Slowly, his sense of duty reasserted itself. He decided that he would go back to the *spahis*.

At this point he broke off his narration, to ask:

"What became of my pipe? The pipe I bought in Kayes, and which I left in thy keeping when we went to the *dioula's* house?"

Kante produced the pipe, which Yero Sa took with manifest emotion. Reassured as to its fate, the *spahi* put another question.

"My wives, and the children, where are they?"

"They went back to their villages, when thou wert gone more than three weeks. I kept, however, thy oldest son in my family, so that he would grow up a warrior."

"That is good," approved Yero Sa. And he resumed his tale.

He had told the leader of the Tebbous, Talifa, of his problem, and Talifa had agreed with him that he must join his own kind. Talifa, Yero Sa declared emphatically, was a splendid man.

After due consideration, it had been decided that the road through Zinder, Say and Sikosso, was not to be thought of. Yero Sa might meet with Mohammed Kabarta outside French territory, for the *dioula* traveled a great deal to buy captives in the east to sell in Timbuktu during the salt season.

Yero Sa should take the northern route, through the lands of the Tuaregs. For many days, the Tebbous had escorted their friend. According to Yero, unbelievable adventures had befallen them along the way, delaying his return for many weeks.

At last, nearing the Niger River, Talifa had declared that he could go no farther. And Yero Sa had left him behind, although he had liked him beyond most men.

At Gao, Yero Sa had learned that the detachment had been moved from Kerouane to Timbuktu, that Morin had not reappeared.

"What will Lieutenant Simier say?" Yero Sa asked.

"He is not as other men. Perhaps he would help thee, or perhaps he would have thee shot."

"Shot?" queried Yero Sa, opening wide eyes.

Kante then told Yero of the sentence passed in Kayes, a sentence that could be carried out summarily anywhere French troops found the presumed deserter. Yero Sa gestured angrily.

"Why should I be shot?"

"Thou didst disappear through thine own fault," explained Kante, severely.

Yero Sa tore the cloth from his shoulder, baring the scar.

"I can prove that I did not go willingly. Thou didst do as much as I against Kabarta.

I was unlucky, that's my fault. Ah, I come back at the cost of great fatigue from Kanem, I leave friends, and I hear thee say 'shot!'" Yero Sa's anger grew. "Thy lieutenant, is he a fool that he would not understand? At the most, I should be imprisoned for a few days."

Kante lifted a warning hand.

"Yero Sa, call not the Frenchman a fool," he cried, bristling.

"*Fali toubaboul*" shouted Yero Sa, losing all restraint. "White men are asses!"

For a moment, Kante stood silent under the insult. This was sheer anarchy, coming from a man who was still legally a *spahi*.

"Thou hast lost thy head," he remarked at last. "And I will not call thee to account. Too much time spent with the Tebbou thieves—" he added. Then, his sense of the just counterbalancing his indignation—" "But it is hard to be told of coming death."

"I will not be shot," proclaimed Yero Sa, "I will go back, to the Tebbous."

"What will Lieutenant Morin say," asked Kante, gravely, "when he comes back, and I tell him?"

"What will he say if Yero Sa is so dead that nothing can bring him to life?"

This was a hard question to answer. Kante, able soldier that he was, parried.

"There need be no shooting until he comes back." he volunteered. "Thou canst hide around Timbuktu until he does."

"Will he save me then?"

"If he thinks it is right," Kante assured. "He will know whether tricking Mohammed the *dioula* was worth thy death."

Yero Sa, not satisfied, grumbled. Kante saw that the months away from the detachment had created that deadly sin in a soldier—reasoning. Before his stay with the Tebbous, Yero Sa would not have worried so much over his rights. He would have left the decision to Morin without protest.

"Lieutenant Morin may never come back. Then must I hide forever?" Yero Sa asked.

Kante was compelled to admit that in such a case, matters would not be fortunate. If Morin did not come back, no one else would take the trouble to plead for the *spahi*. Much as he admired Simier, Kante dreaded to take Yero Sa before him.

"I'll tell thee what we do," he compromised. "I know a friend of Lieutenant Morin. Perhaps, our lieutenant has written him. We go see him."

"He won't tell any one of my return?" Yero Sa asked cautiously.

"We don't need to tell him who thou art. And, even should he know, he would not speak. He is a white man's *marabout* priest."

The two found the *marabout* watering his garden, clad in sun helmet, sandals and a white cassock. Kante, who had spoken with him before, addressed him as "father." Yero Sa, reassured by the white beard and the kind blue eyes of the priest, launched out in a truthful narration of his adventure.

"My son," replied the *marabout*, who spoke Yero Sa's language better than the *spahi* himself, "thou wert a fool, true. But all men are fools some days in their life. Not being a soldier, I can not help thee. Men of the sword listen to none but other warriors.

"Thy lieutenant, Morin, is in France, in good health. He was delayed by his duties there. I received a letter, but a fortnight ago, stating that he would return in three months. He will know what is to be done. Fear nothing, and keep hidden from sight until then." The priest laid his hand on Yero Sa's arm gently. "And remember, Yero Sa, that men of thy faith trust Allah."

"Allah's name be praised," Yero Sa added.

"Go in peace, now—the man who trusts Allah is rewarded."

As they left, Yero Sa turned to Kante.

"He is indeed a *marabout*," he declared wryly. "For he said 'Fear nothing, and keep hidden.' Tell me, is that sensible?"

Kante, scandalized, was certain that the Tebbous had ruined Yero Sa's character beyond possible redemption; for what could be done with a man who called white men asses, and questioned a *marabout's* saying?

The sergeant accompanied his friend to the open plain and took leave.

"Recall that Morin will be here in three months or a few days over. Be back then," he advised. "I will send word to thy wives to come to Timbuktu at the time."

"Good," agreed Yero Sa. "I will hide near Gao for the time. Then, if Morin is not back, I will go to Kanem, and join the Tebbous once again."

He whipped his horse.

Kante watched him go, erect and at ease in the saddle, from which the long shield hung. Across Yero Sa's back a rifle glistened. And Kante suddenly wondered

whether Yero Sa did not hope that Morin would not return to the Sudan; the life among the Tebbous had gripped him, and he had referred to it constantly.

The sergeant recalled anecdotes told him by Yero Sa, tales of looting, of raids into wealthy villages, of long rides under the stars, of rejoicing by night over the day's winnings. True, there was considerable attraction in that free existence, without discipline, without a white man to say exactly how and why and when a thing should be done.

His pay seemed small beside the heaps of gold dust, the many tusks, that Yero Sa told about. And the *spahi* proved the truth of his words by showing his belongings: Fine arms, a splendid horse, and money, all his own.

For an instant, Kante was sorely tempted to gallop after Yero, to tell him that he also wanted to go east, and be a Tebbou. The pillaging instinct in his race, but yesterday on the surface, swept him. He reined his horse, and stood silhouetted against the sky.

To the north, the desert opened. Behind him was Timbuktu, the French, discipline. The Tebbous, fighting, pleasure and personal profit were his if he followed Yero Sa, and forgot his duty.

Then, from Fort Hugueny, the notes of a cavalry trumpet came. Kante straightened in the saddle. The wanderlust vanished. He was a white man's soldier.

Slowly, he rode back toward the trumpet's call.

YERO SA had fully intended to gain Gao, where he had made friends while passing through on his return from Kanem.

Three days' march from Timbuktu, however, he stopped at a village, to spend the night. To his warlike qualities, Yero Sa joined a magnetism that won him friends when he wished. The village appeared to him an ideal spot to spend a few months. When the time came he could slip back into Timbuktu, see whether Morin had returned and, if not, start out to join the Tebbous.

Although they have been horsemen for centuries, the Sudanese blacks ignore the principles of equine hygiene. In the *spahis*, Yero Sa had been taught many things by a white veterinarian on a tour of inspection, who had been attracted by his intelligence and his ability to speak French.

Yero Sa's arrival at the Sudanese village coincided with the sickness of the chief's mare, a well trained, beautiful animal, esteemed by her owner to be worth many ordinary wives. Yero Sa expertly diagnosed the case as gastric trouble, and set to work; while the sorcerer, helpless in spite of pretended activity with various noise producing instruments, looked on in amazement.

When Yero proved that he could also treat camels and sheep, his fortune was made. He was given a hut, and the various comforts that are deemed necessary by black men's hospitality.

Without his uniform, there was nothing to distinguish him from any other black. There were many Toucouleurs in the region who had never been *spahis*. The French visited the village very seldom.

For two months he passed tranquil days. Occasionally the village was occupied by Tuareg rebels for a night. Then, *spahis* were announced approaching and Yero Sa hid.

"THE women are hiding," remarked Duga Kante.

The female population of the village in which Simier had halted his men had gradually melted into the shadows of the huts. In all primitive lands the vanishing of women is a certain prelude to trouble.

Simier nodded.

The sergeant saw the tiny muscles ripple about the lips and the eyelids quiver, ever a sign of alertness on the lieutenant's part. Simier motioned imperceptibly with his hand, and Kante leisurely gathered the seven men forming the white man's escort.

Three days before, Simier had been ordered by the governor to run down certain rumors seeping into Timbuktu from the north bank of the Niger, foreboding a renewal of activity by N'Gouna, leader of the rebellious Tuaregs.

The negro gatherings along the river, peaceful boatmen and fishermen hamlets, were unwilling to give him information, fearing reprisals. N'Gouna was not a personage to cross carelessly. The disappearance of the women portended the presence of the Tuaregs in the vicinity; evidently they were being taken out of the path of stray shots.

Simier, talking in dialect with the notables of the village, made a last attempt to obtain the truth.

"Do not fear," he repeated once again, "if you men tell me where N'Gouna is, I'll see to it that he is caught or slain."

"He has many men, you are but few," replied the spokesman of the natives.

"I will come back with a strong column——"

"Heed my word, white man," the chief insisted. "Go while it is yet time." He glanced fearfully about him. "Even now, I have perhaps said too much."

"The Targui, then, is close by," surmised Simier.

Leaving the natives, who promptly followed their women into hiding, the lieutenant joined his men, and mounted. Turning in the saddle, he smiled at the *spahis:*

"Yes, we are too few," he announced. "I may tell you that I asked for the full detachment to come with me. The governor said no." Again he smiled nervously. "I tell you this, *spahis,* because it is sure that we all will be dead in a few hours. You have always trusted me, since we came north, and I want you to know that this is not my fault."

Kante grinned.

"Maybe, last fight be best fight yet, lieutenant."

The central place of the village was deserted. Tall trees cast long shadows across the ground. Through an opening between the huts the broad, placid surface of the Niger could be seen.

"It is useless," stated Simier, "to stay here and bring destruction upon the village."

He lifted his hand, and the *spahis,* carbines in hand, trotted out of the village, taking the trail parallel with the river.

The sky was empty of clouds, smooth as scrubbed pewter. The dried grass spread over the plain, broken in spots by drying marshes which swarmed with tiny flies. Rows of acacias and mimosa bushes formed natural hedges, crisscrossing the countryside—splendid hiding-places.

Unhurried, in the stillness of the near desert, the little group of *spahis* progressed, red coats and helmets in orderly array, with the white-clad lieutenant standing out conspicuously on the Arab horse he had brought from his garrison in Algeria.

After a while Kante spoke again.

"*Bourdanes!*" he proclaimed, using the *spahis'* name for Tuaregs.

He pointed. His keen eyes had been the first to perceive movement on the shimmering horizon, the glint of spear heads, and the flapping of cloth.

"*Bourdanes,*" he repeated, "many of them. N'Gouna is there!"

Simier reined in his horse, searched his pockets. He brought forth several objects: his watch, his wallet, two photographs in a case.

"Take these, Kante. Thou, perhaps, wilt escape. I will not, for it is I they wish to kill. If able, hand them to my friend in Timbuktu—" he gave the name— "he will send them to my people in France."

"If thou art killed today, Lieutenant, then all the *spahis* will be dead too," objected Kante. "And, it may chance that I, and not thou, will be slain. Allah alone knows who is chosen."

Simier looked at him steadily, and again smiled.

"Right, Sergeant. Allah knows." Then, he added: "There is a chance that they will not shoot at first, but try to capture me alive. We will rush on them with the sabers."

Kante saw him shake his shoulders, as if to throw off evil forebodings.

"Open order!"

Fifteen feet ahead, his naked saber across the saddle, Simier rolled a cigaret. In imitation, Kante took advantage of the few minutes left before the actual shock and sucked his pipe. A sense of pride in himself, in his chief, in his men, filled his soul with a dim pleasant surge. Here they were, warriors, about to meet other warriors. It was as it should be.

"Trumpeter!" ordered Simier, "give us a call. Let them know who we are!"

The trumpeter pressed his thick lips to the mouthpiece of his instrument, and blew. The air rang with the vibrant notes, and the brassy tune shattered the silence, vibrated as if suspended over the Niger, while from the Tuaregs came an answering shout, with the squeal of many horns.

"Sling carbines," ordered Simier. When his desire was executed, he added: "Sabers!"

The blades left the scabbards, and shone in the sun like silvery streaks. For the first since Kante knew him, Simier appeared good humored. A shot came from the Tuareg lines; the bullet ripped the ground twenty feet short and many yards wide.

The *spahis* laughed.

The soldiers charged the first group, tumbling Tuaregs from the saddles, leaping here and there, following the lieutenant, whose white coat could be discerned in a whirl of blue *gandouras*. It was a great fight, which would long be talked about, around the fires of the Tuaregs, from the Sahel to the far north. The Tuaregs had few fire arms, and met the *spahis* with steel.

Although they had no hope of escape, the soldiers intended to do all they could before being killed. Each man, it must be recalled, was a picked member of the detachment, which was the pick of the Sudanese *spahis*, who are, as all men know, the pick of the Sudanese fighting blacks. But when the first group was dispersed, there was another. When that other melted under the weight of the *spahis'* sabers, there came a third.

Kante parried, swung or lunged instinctively. His point caught the edge of a hide covered shield, tipped it skilfully, leaped upward a bare fraction of an inch, slid and found its mark.

Nine men facing three hundred! Kante became aware that there were only seven left. The trumpeter, who had sounded the call so boldly but five minutes ago, had disappeared, and another man, whom Kante had esteemed, was gone also.

Simier's right leg was drenched with blood. A spear had caught him above the knee, and ripped upward. The *spahi* nearest the lieutenant, with a deft back-hand blow, stripped the skin from the Targui rider's face. Kante reached for the revolver at his belt, and shattered the fellow's skull. But the man did not fall; his mount carried him clear of the mêlée, reeling in the saddle.

The sergeant threw his saber hilt into the visage of a Targui, who had drawn back his arm for a spear thrust, and grinned as he saw him plunge backward, not dead, but so stunned that he would take no further part in the fight.

A few yards away a *spahi* was struggling to keep himself in the saddle, while two dismounted Tuaregs were dragging at his leg, a third held his saber blade in bleeding fingers. Kante attempted to go to his help, but too late. A lance had reached from behind, and the narrow steel tip burst through the stout red cloth over the breast.

But six left now.

"We're clear," came Simier's hoarse shout. "Run for the river bank!"

The Niger was five hundred yards away. The survivors reached the bank well ahead of their pursuers. Dismounted, the carbines now would have their turn. Simier, who was a good shot, borrowed the weapon of the man nearest him, and dropped two riders in full stride. The men tumbled comically as they hurtled from the saddles.

"Did I not say that this last fight would be the best?" Kante boasted.

Leading their horses, they sank farther into the rushes, until the sound of running water warned them that the stream was not far off. There, screened from their foes' vision, they could see plainly. A rapid investigation of cartridge-boxes revealed plenty of ammunition. Simier had done all within his power, and the extra supply of cartridges meant so many hours more of life.

Wearied of serving as targets, the Tuaregs had abandoned their horses and taken cover. They crawled forward in small groups, by quick rushes, in the customary manner of frontier fighters. They had formed a semicircle, each extremity resting on the river bank, at considerable distance from the *spahis*. This semicircle was gradually narrowed.

In battle there are periods when the time passes swiftly, others when it drags, according to the intensity of the action. The savage rush through the enemy had taken but thirty seconds, yet seemed to Kante to have lasted hours. On the other hand, the afternoon came and passed quickly, the hours were but moments to him, all too short.

Night came, and the discharges of the guns tore through the darkness like red lightning, winking and playing on the faces of the inclosing attackers. The stars appeared, and blinked down upon the struggle. Then, before the rising moon, they paled and dwindled. Kante, recalling the moonlit night at Kerouane when he had first disliked Simier—for whom he was now to die gladly—thought of Yero Sa.

"Too bad," he remarked to his comrades, "that Yero Sa missed such a day. He was a warrior."

The Tuaregs were very near now.

YERO SA had ascended a tall tree and, one leg swung comfortably over a branch, witnessed the first encounter. At first, he was detached, critical, then as the fight unrolled its hundred phases he

became excited, clenched his hands, shouted orders, gave suggestions to the red-coated cavalrymen, fully two miles away.

The uniforms and white helmets permitted him to distinguish the French party among the blue and white of the Tuaregs. Below him, the scene spread like an animated map. He saw one group after another scattered, saw the *spahis* slicing into the thick of the rebels, and coming out on the far side.

When the riders gained the shelter of the rushes, Yero Sa screamed with joy. By Allah! That white man was as good a fighter as Morin ever was! At one time Yero had thought him killed, for he had momentarily lost sight of him. Then, Simier had emerged again, and a tremendous weight had lifted from Yero Sa's heart.

Spirits of the night! Sorcerers of gloom! What a fight was going on! Even the Tebbous could not have fought thus. Eight Toucouleurs and a single white man were in a fair way of dragging ten times their number to paradise. Yero Sa envied Kante. The sergeant, who had been forever telling of good fights, was seeing one that surpassed even his embellished tales—and seeing it not from the top of a tree.

Yero Sa was tempted to go down, mount his horse, and ride to join his comrades. The realization that he had no uniform, that his own friends would very likely shoot him down before he was able to make himself known, alone held him back.

With the *spahis* in the rushes, the combat settled down to a musketry engagement, and there was not much to see. The spectacle became monotonous. Puffs of white smoke from the Tuareg's guns, which fired so high that the missiles often splashed down in the Niger beyond the mark; an occasional tumble as a Gras bullet took effect—that was all. From the rushes lifted no smoke, for the carbines of the *spahis* fired smokeless ammunition.

"It's only a few hours," shouted the chief of the village from below, "before the soldiers will be finished."

The leader, with the entire population, had abandoned their concealment to watch the battle.

Yero Sa agreed and descended to the ground.

His spirit was writhing within him, and he was losing self-respect. *Spahis* were fighting, and Yero Sa was idle. Was it right? Before Yero Sa's mind rose the vision of Talifa, the Tebbou. What would Talifa do if his friends were in danger? Would he occupy the hours with arguments against his better self, or would he help? If Morin did not come back, and Yero Sa went back to Kanem, could he tell Talifa of the great fight he had seen, in which his best friends had been slain, while he, Yero Sa, shirked?

But what could he do? To be killed uselessly hurt his sense of economy.

The firing could be plainly heard. There was yet time to do something. Practiced in the art of war, Yero Sa understood that the Tuareg would not close in until darkness. He glanced at the sun. There were several hours of daylight. Would he stay here, and be tortured? No, he would mount his horse, and run away. Never again would he come back to this village, which had been the scene of his shameful hesitation.

His hut was close to the water front. His horse was sheltered under a canopy of thatch, supported on six straight branches. He unhooked the saddle from the wall and made ready.

As he hoisted himself into place, he rose sufficiently high to look over the crest of the surrounding wall, that enclosed his hut and stable, into a small compound.

He saw the sandy bank of the river.

Yero Sa, if he sometimes ran into trouble, had flashes of sheer genius. For months on end, he would exist as others of his color. Then, when the occasion demanded, inspiration would come. It is not on record that opportunity ever sought Yero Sa in vain. There exists a French proverb: "To seize the occasion by the hair." Yero could be depended upon to find the hair.

Afoot, he ran to the river.

Drawn up beyond reach of the water, forty or fifty canoes were drying in the sun. Yero looked about prudently. He was about to play a shabby trick on the villagers and had no desire to be seen. He was soon reassured; the natives were intent on the combat. After all, the loss of a few canoes should not be too high a price to pay for such a sight. Yero reasoned that every thrill of life must be paid for.

Many of the canoes were large, intended for several paddlers. But Yero, excited to superhuman strength, pushed the crafts into the stream one after another, taking each

out far enough to swing into the powerful central current.

He then collected the paddles, and broke the handles. The task left him drenched with sweat but triumphant.

At last, but one canoe was left, a clumsy trunk, ponderous, huge. This craft Yero dragged also into the river. Instead of releasing it to the mercy of the Niger, he scrambled in, squatted in the stern, and picked up the paddle.

He had never made a practise of paddling, which strained the muscles and exacted undignified labor. Now, to carry out his scheme, he must paddle upstream. Luckily, this was the dry season, and the current was not swift. Had it been, Yero Sa, struggling with the unwieldly canoe, would have been forced downstream in spite of his efforts. As it was, Yero contemplated with dread the two-mile journey.

Apparently, he slid back two feet for every foot gained. Then, little by little, he acquired the knack, and progressed at moderate speed. He sung a boatman's song, believing this would help him. But he found that he must concentrate his entire energy on the muscular task.

After twenty minutes, he drew even with the gathered negroes watching the fight. They stared at him, but, as he had gained the opposite shore, he was not recognized. He noticed many gestures of warning: The negroes were informing him that lead was flying freely up river.

When he found that he was half way to his destination, he groaned. His arms seemed too weary to allow him to continue. But more than his sense of duty, more than his loyalty to Kante and the *spahis* spurred him on—his Toucouleur ego was involved. He must finish what he had attempted.

The sun lowered with startling rapidity ahead of him, splashing the dark velvety water with orange light that stretched long fingers toward the prow of his canoe. And Yero Sa paddled on. Had he but known, he could have spared himself fatigue; the canoe was inshore. He could have used a pole to better advantage. But he did not know.

Brrrrzzzzz—the familiar sound of leaping lead, sharp and clear, an impact on the water, and the purring of a ricocheting bullet informed him that he was level with the spot where his comrades lay concealed in the rushes. A Targui motioned to him to keep on upstream, supporting his request by a shot. Obediently, Yero paddled on a few hundred yards, until he was able to nest his canoe in tall grass.

Glad of a chance to rest, he lighted his beloved pipe and waited for darkness.

At one time, when the firing abruptly ceased, he feared that all was over, and he grunted with mingled disgust and sorrow. But the carbines cracked again, oftener than before, and Yero mumbled a prayer.

Night.

Leaving his hiding-place, Yero paddled straight across, trusting to the current to bring him down to Simier's men. The stars did not give sufficient light for him to be detected by men intent only upon one target. He touched shore too far upstream, and was compelled to drift until he reached the desired spot. As he sank into the shadow of the rushes, the moon appeared. His craft bumped softly into the sand. He leaped out, dragged the canoe a third of its length upon the shore. He could discern the *spahis*, all with their backs to him, facing the Tuaregs.

"Duga Kante!" he cried softly.

The sergeant whirled so swiftly that the barrel of his carbine smote the man near him.

"It is Yero Sa," said the Toucouleur hastily. "I have a canoe, paddles. We go."

The sergeant yelled in exultation, and called Simier. At such moments, explanations are not required long. The canoe was there. Limping, the lieutenant led the way, fell on the moist bottom. The rest clambered in.

"My horse—" breathed Simier.

Kante understood. Much as he disliked to kill the beautiful animal, he ran back, fired one shot. N'Gouna would not gain prestige by exhibiting the officer's mount between his unworthy legs. Yero Sa heard Simier's heavy breathing. True, the white man must love his horse. He laid his hand on the lieutenant's sleeve.

"Give the word."

"Go," uttered Simier.

Yero Sa, in spite of his long freedom from army discipline, had fallen back into ancient habits—the orders were Simier's to give.

Kante and the others grasped paddles, and the canoe shot out toward the middle of the Niger. Engrossed by the care exercised in drawing near the supposed ambush of the *spahis*, the Tuareg did not, for

the moment, discover the boat. Yero Sa could hear them calling out to one another.

Then, a cry of rage rippled along the shore, transmitted from lip to lip, swelling into a pandemonium of angry shouts. Shots streaked the night. But the moonlight is bad for accurate firing.

It was then that Simier fainted.

As he bandaged the ugly wound on Simier's leg, Kante questioned Yero.

"How long will it take the slobs to catch up with us?"

"They can not start until morning," replied Yero Sa, "I cast all the other canoes of the village adrift downstream. Now that night is here, even strong swimmers can not locate them until day."

"The *Bourdanes* may go down to another village."

"The nearest is four hours away. We are safe," said Yero.

A MONTH later, Yero Sa, splendid in new garments of blue and red, squatted near the threshold of the officers' quarters, at Fort Hugueny.

Scorning to wait for official confirmation of the award, the Commander of Timbuktu had fastened a medal on his breast, before the assembled *spahis*, *tirailleurs* and artillerymen of the garrison, before the gathered population. Before pinning the yellow and green ribbon, with the tiny precious metal disk—fetish of the bravest soldiers of France—the officer, in full uniform, had read a flattering account of Yero Sa's prowess.

Bewildered, Yero Sa learned that he was no longer considered a deserter. His efforts to regain his unit were extolled. His loyalty to his comrades after many months away from the inspiring influence of the barracks, fell, the commander declared, "nothing short of antique grandeur."

Yero Sa's courage, his presence of mind, ending in the rescue of a white lieutenant, a sergeant and four privates, would take "honorable place in the long list of heroic deeds of the faithful black soldiers of the Republic, who carried the flag ever forward, toward the heart of the continent," the speaker concluded.

Moreover, Yero was granted his back pay, as if he had never been away from the *spahis*. He could not help wondering, however, what a change had come over his situation, when he had appeared as a savior, instead of being a penitent private asking for leniency. His last action had wiped out all others.

Following the ceremony, Kante had asked—

"What of Mohammed Kabarta?"

"What of him?"

"Wilt not thou seek him out for revenge?"

"It is thus," explained Yero Sa, after a long period of thought. "Had Kabarta, a merchant, attacked me with a sword and been harmed, he would have no one but himself to blame, for the sword is my tool. I attempted to trick him at his trade. He won. It was right, for men must keep their trade.

"More, Kante, had not the *dioula* sent me away, I would not have been in the village near the Niger when a man was needed there. I would have been in the rushes with you all. And now we would all be dead. Mohammed Kabarta was a tool of Allah, carrying out, though he knew it not, Allah's will to save us."

So, to day, the long sequence of events growing out of the *dioula's* deed was ended. Yero Sa gazed with somnolent eyes at the play of light over the sanded yard. Through this red haze, he saw a rider approach and dismount. Seeing three stripes, he pulled himself erect, saluted. Then, recognizing the newcomer, he cried out happily.

"Lieutenant!"

"Captain!" Morin corrected with mock severity. "Well, I see that all has been well with thee."

"Yes, captain. All was well."

Morin, about to enter the house, half turned.

"Up to thy old tricks, Yero Sa," he chided. "Loafing around thy officer's door. Mark me: Some one'll be angry with thee yet!"

"Yes, captain."

Morin disappeared. Yero Sa heard loud voices exclaiming in excited French.

Carefully, he dusted the threshold of the dust left by the captain's boots. Then, he resumed his place, chuckling as he nursed his pipe between his ebony fingers.

THE CAMP FIRE

A Meeting Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

SOME words on various subjects from a good American. The plan referred to in the first paragraph is compulsory conscription of all capital and labor in wartime. It might not have kept us out of the World War, but that plan, adopted by a majority—or even a few of the most powerful—of nations, would end war.

Thetford Mines, Quebec.

Comrade Captain Nabor's talk to the Camp-Fire assembly seems very reasonable and looks as though if it could be realized in action it would restrain at least some of the interest and influence which in the past have been least willing for war, on account of the profits it seems to offer. Had it been in effect ten years ago, it could hardly have kept the United States out of the World War, for German disregard of our rights, as well as open threats, would finally have compelled action such as did come in 1917. It would, however, have prevented or at least greatly reduced the various grafts, thefts and general profiteering which have been a stench in our nostrils ever since.

It is refreshing to note Captain Nabor's views on the Anti-Weapon Laws also.

REFERRING to the questions put before the crowd around the Fire as to an issue a month for Camp-Fire alone, the writer would be rather sorry to see the present arrangement changed, as he likes, after reading a story or two, to dip into "Camp-Fire" and "Ask Adventure" for something of live interest, but different from its general contents. We nearly all like pie, cake, preserves, as a highly desirable feature of a good meal, but after we sat

down a time or two to a table laden with only these things to the exclusion of meat, potatoes, coffee, bread and butter and other solid and filling rations, our taste for pie and so forth would not be nearly so keen as when we top off a meal of good substantial eats with such extras. If the change is made, we will trail along for awhile at least and give it a fair try-out.

THE various proposed plans for our citizens to regain control of our government make interesting reading. All appear to have good points and probably any of them could be made effective, provided that two conditions could be met and maintained. *viz:*—first. To devise a way to prevent the elements which have secured control of our affairs from ever getting *even* a look in, much less a footing in the Citizen Association. (Call it by any name you choose.)

Second. For *all* citizens to be Americans first of all and to be always on the alert to repel attack on their liberties from any and every quarter, whether it be partisan, ecclesiastical, racial, capitalistic, trades-union and any and every other clan which puts its welfare above the welfare of its fellow citizens. Of course, this would also mean stern resistance to any and every foreign influence which might engineer open or stealthy attack on our liberties.

At least some of us around the Fire are old American stock whose great-grandfathers fought to obtain our Constitutional rights and liberty and we, the great grandsons, are not worthy of our forbearers if we sit idly by while what they won for us is stolen from us.—S. H. RALSTON.

WHEN Talbot Mundy first began talking to me about the *Tros* stories (there are to be others) and about Cæsar and his times I began cussing myself for having done what I very particularly hold in contempt—I'd been swallowing whole some other fellow's collecting and interpretation of facts and the whole conception resulting therefrom. All of us are naturally inclined to do this; that is why our civilization shows so many stupidities. But a minority struggle against this lazy, sheep-like habit and try to think for themselves as best they can. I'd flattered myself I was among those who tried—and then Talbot Mundy came along and made me see what a stupid sheep I'd been.

Since school I haven't studied history (except for a few years that of ancient Ireland) or even done more than desultory reading—for example, learning from Hugh Pendexter's stories more than I'd ever known before of the history of our own country, and from others of our fiction writers more of the history of various countries. I'd had to translate Cæsar's Commentaries and to absorb more or less history as she is taught. It was impressed upon me that Cæsar was a great man, an heroic figure. His Commentaries I accepted as true word for word. Did not other historians accept and build upon them? Were they not everywhere perpetuated in the schools without ever a question raised as to their complete trustworthiness.

IN LATER years, of course, I learned that historians, instead of being infallible, were merely human beings grubbing among scattered bits of facts and trying to build out of them a complete conception of something on which they generally had no first hand information whatever. Also, that if one of them made a mistake, many of those after him were likely to swallow the mistake and perpetuate it, and, on the other hand, that the historian of today, having at hand added bits of facts, is likely to consider the historian of yesterday very much out of date and not to be trusted too much in his deductions. In other words, any historian, including him of today, is, by the historian's own test, not a final authority but merely a more or less skillful guesser at the whole truth from what small bits of it he manages to collect.

Yet I had been swallowing whole, without question, all the historians had been handing me. To be sure, Shaw years ago had merrily slapped most of the historians in the face and presented a comparatively new conception of Julius Cæsar, but by that time I'd reached the stage where I didn't accept other people's say-so so easily. Like a true sheep, I relapsed pretty well into my old conception of a very heroic Cæsar and a very wonderful and rather admirable Roman Empire.

THEN Mr. Mundy, after much delving into books, arose and challenged the whole works and I awoke to contempt for myself. I don't mean I just scrapped all my old conceptions and accepted his, but I realized that I, at least, had nothing whatever with which to support the old ideas against the new. Maybe Mr. Mundy is all or partly wrong. I don't know. Let's hear the other side in rebuttal. There are plenty of historians, both professional and amateur, among us who gather at Camp-Fire. Let's hear from them.

One thing seems clear to me. If historians have accepted the Commentaries as

completely as Mr. Mundy says, then I'm "off them" and for the same reason as Mr. Mundy—I hesitate to swallow whole the account of himself and his doings that an ambitious man wrote or had written to be read by the voters and politicians he must win to him in order to realize his ambitions.

Let's hear Mr. Mundy's case:

I have followed Cæsar's Commentaries as closely as possible in writing this story, but as Cæsar, by his own showing, was a liar, a brute, a treacherous humbug and a conceited ass, as well as the ablest military expert in the world at that time; and as there is plenty of information from ancient British, Welsh and Irish sources to refute much of what he writes, I have not been to much trouble to make him out a hero.

IN THE first place, I don't believe he wrote his Commentaries. His secretary did. Most of it is in the third person, but here and there the first person creeps in, showing where Cæsar edited the copy, which was afterward, no doubt, transcribed by a slave who did not dare to do any reediting.

The statement is frequently made that Cæsar *must* be accurate because all other Roman historians agree with him. But they all copied from him, so that argument doesn't stand. No man who does his own press-agenting is entitled to be accepted on his own bare word, and as Cæsar was quite an extraordinary criminal along every line but one (he does not seem to have been a drunkard) he is even less entitled to be believed than are most press agents. He was an epileptic, whose fits increased in violence as he grew older, and he was addicted to every form of vice (except drunkenness) then known. He habitually used the plunder of conquered cities for the purpose of bribing the Roman senate; he cut off the right hands of fifty thousand Gauls on one occasion, as a mere act of retaliation; he broke his word as often, and as treacherously, as he saw fit; and he was so vain that he ordered himself deified and caused his image to be set in Roman temples, with a special set of priests to burn incense before it.

AS A general he was lucky, daring, skillful—undoubtedly a genuis. As an admiral, he was fool enough to anchor his fleet off an open shore, where, according to his own account, a storm destroyed it. (In this story I have described what *may* have happened.) And he was idiot enough to repeat the mistake a year later, losing his fleet a second time.

He pretends his expeditions to Britain were successful. But a successful general does not usually sneak away by night. On his second invasion of Britain he actually raided as far as Lunden (London), but it is very doubtful whether he actually ever saw the place, and it is quite certain that he cleared out of Britain again as fast as possible, contenting himself with taking hostages and some plunder to make a show in his triumphal procession through the streets of Rome. And whatever Cæsar *wrote* about those expeditions, what his men had to *say* about them can be surmised fairly accurately from the fact that Rome left Britain severely alone for several generations.

CÆSAR reports that the Britons were barbarians, but there is plenty of evidence to the contrary. They were probably the waning tag-end of a high civilization; which would mean that they had several distinct layers of society, including an aristocratic caste—that they had punctilious manners, and a keen and probably quixotic sense of chivalry. For instance, Cæsar's account that they fought nearly naked is offset by the fact that they thought it cowardly not to expose their bodies to the enemy. Their horsemanship, their skill in making bronze wheels and weapons, and their wickerwork chariots can hardly be called symptoms of barbarism.

The Britons were certainly mixed; their aristocrats were fair-haired and very white-skinned; but there were dark-haired, dark-skinned folk among them, as well as rufous Northmen, the descendants of North Sea rovers. They can not have been ignorant of the world, because for centuries prior to Cæsar's time there had been a great deal of oversea trade in tin. They used gold, and in such quantities that it must have been obtained from oversea. They were skillful in the use of wool. And they were near enough to Gaul to be in constant touch with it; moreover, they spoke practically the same language as the Gauls.

THE Samothracian Mysteries have baffled most historians and, down to this day, nothing whatever is known of their actual teaching. Of course, all the Mysteries were secret; and at all times any initiate, of whatever degree, who attempted to reveal the secrets, or who did reveal any of them even unintentionally, was drastically punished. At certain periods, when the teaching had grown less spiritual, such offenders were killed.

Samothrace has no harbors and no safe anchorage, which may account for the fact that it has never been really practically occupied by any foreign power, although it is quite close to the coast of Greece. The ruins of the ancient temples remain today. It is probably true that the Samothracian Mysteries were the highest and the most universally respected, and that their Hierophants sent out from time to time emissaries, whose duty was to purify the lesser Mysteries in different parts of the world and to reinstruct the teachers. At any rate it is quite certain that all the Mysteries were based on the theory of universal brotherhood (any Free and Accepted Mason will understand at once what is meant by that) and that they had secret signs and passwords in common, by means of which any initiate could make himself known to another, even if he could not speak the other's language. The Mysteries extended to the far East, and travel to the East, for the purpose of studying the Mysteries was much more common than is frequently supposed.

CÆSAR loathed the Druids (who were an order—and a very high one—of the Mysteries) because his own private character and life were much too rotten to permit his being a candidate for initiation. In all ages the first requirement for initiation has been clean living and honesty. He admits in his Commentaries that he burned the Druids alive in wicker cages, and he accuses the Druids of having done the same thing to their victims; but

Cæsar's bare word is not worth the paper it is written on. His motive is obvious. And any one who knows anything at all about the Mysteries—especially any Free and Accepted Mason—knows without any doubt whatever that no initiate of any genuine Mystery would go so far as to consider human sacrifice or any form of preventable cruelty.

KISSING was a general custom among the Britons. Men kissed each other. The hostess always kissed the guest. It was a sign of good faith and hospitality, the latter being almost a religion. Whoever had been kissed could not be treated as an enemy while under the same roof.

The spelling and pronunciation of common names presents the usual problem. Gwenhwyfar, of course, is the early form of Guinevere, but how it was pronounced is not easy to say. Fflur was known as Flora to the Romans, and the accounts of her beauty had much to do with Cæsar's second invasion of Britain, for he never could resist the temptation to ravish another man's wife if her good looks attracted his attention. (But I will tell that in another story.)

TO ME there seems no greater absurdity than to take Cæsar's Commentaries at their face value and to believe on his bare word that the Britons (or the Gauls) were savages. It is impossible that they can have been so. The Romans were savages, in every proper—if not every commonly accepted—meaning of the word. The only superiority they possessed was discipline—but the Zulus under Tchaka also had discipline. The Romans, in Cæsar's time at any rate, had no art of their own worth mentioning, no standard of honor that they observed (although they were *very* fond of prating about honor, and of imputing dishonor to other people), no morals worth mentioning, no religion they believed in, and no reasonable concept of liberty. They were militarists, and they lived by plundering other people. They were unspeakably corrupt and vicious. A Roman legion was a machine, that very soon got out of hand unless kept hard at work and fed with loot, including women. They were disgraceful sailors, using brute force where a real seaman would use brains, and losing whole fleets, in consequence, with astonishing regularity. They were cruel and vulgar, their so-called appreciation of art being exactly that of our modern nouveaux-riches; whatever was *said* to be excellent thay bought or stole and removed to Rome, which was a stinking slum even by the standards of the times, infested by imported slaves and licentious politicians.

BUT they did understand discipline, and they enforced it, when they could, with an iron hand. That enabled them to build roads, and it partly explains their success as law-makers. But Rome was a destroyer, a disease, a curse to the earth. The example that she set, of military conquest and imperialism, has tainted the world's history ever since. It is to Rome and her so-called "classics" that we owe nine-tenths of the false philosophy and mercenary imperialism that has brought the world to its present state of perplexity and distress, long generations having had their schooling at the feet of Rome's historians and even our laws being largely based on Rome's ideas of discipline combined with greed.

Rome rooted out and destroyed the Mysteries and gave us in their place no spiritual guidance, but a stark materialism, the justification of war, and a world-hero—Caius Julius Cæsar, the epileptic liar, who, by his own confession, slew at least three million men and gave their women to be slaves or worse, solely to further his own ambition. *Sic transit gloria Romæ!*

The last paragraph gives this little brain a mighty lot to think about. Is it the Roman Empire we are to thank for much of our present-day materialism? I wonder what our world would be like now if some other people or peoples had brought to the front another kind of civilization and standard? After all it is the moral standard, the mental point of view, that endures. The Roman Empire has rotted into mere history that we argue about. But, after all these centuries, is its moral and social standard gripping and guiding us of today? What will our own moral and social standard do to the future of the world?

These Mysteries of Samothrace and elsewhere—what if Rome had not crushed them out? Or did she? Are they and their teachings still among us, our backs turned to them or our feet ground on them as backs and feet were in Rome's day?

After a thousand or two years we are not quite so material as Talbot Mundy paints the Romans, but still, considering us as a whole, isn't materialism our controlling influence? The magnificent Roman Empire is rotted, gone, wiped out. The world has pretty well employed itself in proving that materialistic nations can not endure. Some time will it get tired and start developing the other kind so that they in turn can have their trial? Will our nation ever do that, or will it just go on doing what the Roman Empire did and become what the Roman Empire is—a thing wiped from the physical earth but sending its curse of materialism on down the centuries?

We're not a materialistic nation? Well, if we've gone so far we don't even know we're materialistic, we're in worse shape than I thought.

FOLLOWING Camp-Fire custom, Don Waters rises to introduce himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine:

South Westport, Massachusetts.

When Jack London was fitting out the *Snark* for his cruise he received many applications from the venturesome, all begging for a berth. Among them, an unnamed youth wrote, urging as his

qualification that he was afflicted with "itchy feet."

THAT'S my trouble—itchy feet. They carried me from Scotland where I was born, thirty odd years ago, to America. Then via Sidedoor Pullman and Cinder Path they have lead me to the four points of the compass. They have pressed against brake and clutch pedals on racing automobiles, speeding over dirt tracks, shoved on rudder bar beneath the control yoke of a hydroplane, a half mile above the waters of the Gulf Stream, have slopped in the muck of the "land and lake" tunnel, a hundred feet below the surface of Lake Michigan while I "twisted the tail" of a chattering Ingersoll, sinking a twelve-foot steel into the heading. They have burned from bare contact with the sun-blistered decks of a windjammer and have been nipped by a thirty-below spell in the Northwest. They have patiently borne the weight of a heavy pack over the trails of the Blue Ridge and Little Smokies and through the reptile ridden paths of the Everglades.

IT'S a queer malady, this one of the itchy feet. A few months in one place, and they call for treatment. Now as I sit overlooking a quiet New England bay where the shores are fringed with oak and birch all dressed in the tan and scarlet of early autumn, my thoughts run to an island in the Bahamas. A wedge of ducks just passed over the water flying low and fast. I watched them with a little tinge of envy until they dwindled from sight. I know the symptoms. My feet are troubling me again. There is nothing I know of that will do them so much good as contact with a salty, sun washed coral beach that lies two thousand miles south by east of here.

So here's my hand to all you of the itchy feet! May you all be able to relieve them! And for you who can not follow the strange paths across the earth, may you find your remedy in the pages of *Adventure* and, in spirit, enjoy the going over the trails your feet long to tread!

Something in his story caused us to raise the question of the price of ambergris. Here are a paragraph out of Mr. Waters' reply and another from his friend the curator:

The enclosed letter from a friend of mine, the assistant curator of the Whaling Museum, will answer the question. I also heard from Captain Mosher, who has the nickname of the "Ambergris King" here, and found that the last of the stuff he sold brought thirty dollars an ounce. It is practically off the market now. There has not been a piece sold in New Bedford for several years, and back in the heydey of whaling when over four hundred vessels cleared out of here, five or six hundred pounds was about the amount brought in annually. I may add that as to the amount mentioned in the story, I saw a record in an old log book lately where one ship recovered 175 pounds in two lumps.

New Bedford, Massachusetts.

Ambergris has varied in price from three hundred dollars to five hundred dollars a pound. Today it would not bring much over the lower figure. About 1850 it was probably somewhere near the higher figure.—A. C. WATSON, Old Dartmouth Historical Society and Whalin Museum.

THERE isn't room, unfortunately, for all the interesting clippings sent in to us by comrades, but they go into our cache and we find space for as many of them as we can.

Worcester, Massachusetts.

Enclosed you will find a couple of clippings you may be interested in.

I never noticed any mention in "Camp-Fire" of Colorado Charley using "Wild Bill's" hair for a hatband. The anecdote about "Calamity Jane" is interesting in itself.

The story about the Sargasso Sea would sound better to me if a Gloucester man told it. It sounds fishy. There are the makings of a story about that dump of the ocean, but it is not meant for me to write it.—R. E. RAWLING.

FIRST, here is a wonderful tale of the Sargasso Sea, told by an old salt at Sailors' Snug Harbor, Staten Island, and printed in the Boston *Post* back in 1923. It has all the thrills.

"Yep," ruminated white-haired rosy-cheeked J. F. Haynes, who went off to sea when he was 14 years old and led the life of a sailor for 63 straight years. "Yep, that sure is an exciting picture all right (a comment evoked by an exhibition of "The Isle of Lost Ships)—but I had an experience in the Sargasso that gave me the biggest thrill of my life."

He cleared his throat and gazed around expectantly. Then with eyes reflective and yet far-visioned, he continued:

"Don't know about all those lost ships floating around on top o' the kelp in the Sargasso Sea, but I know that they must be some under the weeds anyways."

WITH all the joy of an old story-teller, he paused while he stuffed his pipe with a fresh load of tobacco.

"It was back in '89, and I was first mate on the clipper *Donald McKay* out of Boston. We were on our way back from Barbadoes, when we got caught in a hurricane and were driven into the Sargasso Sea.

"We was four days fighting our way out of the weeds, but finally we made it. On the day we cleared, we were caught in a dead calm. It was late afternoon. There wasn't a breath of wind a-stirring. Suddenly the ocean seemed all agitated and appeared to be boiling 'round us. It got quite dark early and we were all feelin' right uneasy.

"PRETTY soon through the pitch black we could see a sort of shimmerin' light and it didn't seem to be so very far away at that. It grew plainer and after a while we made out the outlines of a dismantled sailing ship. The light seemed to be coming from the spars and hull.

"It was uncanny and I'll admit it gave me the cold shivers. But the skipper wanted to find out

what it was all about. So I, as the first officer, and the second officer and eight seamen went out in the longboat to find out.

"Everything was O. K. until we were about halfway to the queer ship. Then suddenly one of the seamen lost an oar. It seemed to be snatched away from him and he gave a wild cry of alarm. I lowered the lantern, but could discover nothing. All of the men felt a heavy tugging at their oars and we made little headway.

"SOMETHING was holding us back.

"We stopped altogether and the second mate put his hand over the side to discover just what it was that was holding us back. Something slimy brushed against his hand. He gave one yell.

"Once again he put his hand over the side and grabbed at the slimy thing. Finally, with much difficulty, he succeeded in pulling in an eel.

"We laughed at our fears, thinkin' we had run into a shallow eel-hole. And finally we got across to the strange ship.

"I was the first to touch its side. It was all dripping wet and was covered with white coral just as though it had been made of cement. It was the oddest looking old vessel I ever saw, and must have been at least 100 years old. It looked as though it had just come up from the bottom of the ocean.

"THERE was a strong smell coming from it. The light that shone from its spars and hulk must have been phosphorus from the sea. We threw a rope with a hook up over the high deck and clambered aboard.

"Leaving one man on deck, the rest of us started to investigate the ship's innards. The whole thing was like a dream. It was a crystal ship, and everything seemed so wonderful, so unreal. It was as if we had been transplanted many fathoms below the sea to the fairy palace of an ancient hulk of solid coral!"

"We could see the opening of a companionway, the door of which had been broken. We started down and it was pretty hard walking on the slippery floor and steps. We finally got into the inner cabin and there pretty much of everything was intact, though somewhat scattered about, and a few pieces of fine old furniture were broken. Lamps and bits of bric-a-brac and chairs and a desk and table were strewn about the room.

"We passed on to another companionway leading into the lower sleeping quarters. On the floor was about a foot of sea water. On the way down we could see what looked like two small green lights in a dark room. We conquered our fears and entered. Some of us had our knives out. We noticed a big cupboard, the door of which had been broken off. We stopped to examine it by the light of the lantern and noticed a big bag in it.

"I touched it and it fell apart, revealing a large quantity of what appeared to be pearls. We started to gather the gems, then we heard a shuffling noise and stopped. Looking in the direction from whence the noise came we saw in the glare of the lantern a long, lean arm coming toward us.

"It grabbed one of the men by the arm. Several knives slashed at it'and it let go. We could then see that it was a giant octopus. We sure got out in a great hurry then and reached the deck just in time to find the man left there with three of these monsters after him. We could see two others moving along on another part of the deck.

"WE GOT off that ship pretty quick and into the longboat none too soon to suit us.

"When we were about 50 yards away from the boat there was a loud rumbling noise, the sea started to bubble around us and the queer ship slowly sank back into the sea.

"I can't account for it, except that there was some strange earth disturbance under the seas, an upheaval that raised the coral ship with its octopus cargo and then another disturbance that settled it. The whole bed of the sea must have been lifted and then dropped and this created the eel hole as well as bringing to light the strange vessel that was at least 100 years old.

"No, I never want to get anywhere near the Sargasso Sea again," concluded the old seaman. "Sailors' Snug Harbor is good enough for me."

NEXT comes an account of experiences in the old West, as set forth by Jason Bradon in the same issue of the Boston *Post:*

Down in the State Street Safe Deposit Vaults the other day a friend drew my particular attention to one of the guards.

"If you are looking for a thrilling story some day, there's a man who can tell you one out of his own experience," he said.

"But will he talk?" I asked.

"Not here perhaps, but get him in a quiet place some time, and ask him how he learned to tote a gun or what he knows about driving a covered wagon, and he will talk."

The man whom he had pointed out was George L. Whitney. He is a modest, polite, unassuming individual, 63 years of age, and seeing him at his work in the vaults you could hardly imagine him in the rôle of an adventurer, pioneer and plainsman.

But such he was in the days of "the covered wagon," when the "red-skin" was making his last stand against the progress of empire in the Black Hills of South Dakota.

MY FRIEND'S tip was a good one, as I learned when I sat down with Mr. Whitney at a dining room table in his home, and he produced his formidable old "gat," and his battered frontiersman's sombrero, with a little silk American flag stuck in the horsehair band.

"I was only a youth of 18, living on Beacon Hill," he began, "when I gave ear to the cry, 'Go West, Young Man,' and a moving picture, which I saw in Boston the other night, "The Covered Wagon" they call it, brought vivid recollections of my two adventures into the Black Hills country as though they had happened but yesterday.

"IN THE spring of 1877 I hitched up with a covered wagon outfit that set out from Yankton for the Black Hills and Deadwood City. You will be surprised to hear that we landed in Yankton from Boston quite penniless. We had our nerve—I'll say we did. Clark & Quinn, the covered wagon freighters, hired us out as handy boys to fetch fuel and water, do livestock chores and help the cook.

"Dakota Territory at that time was as primitive as the regions traversed by the Forty-Niners in the gold rush to California. Wild game abounded. Rattlesnakes were plentiful: in every "dog city" the prairie dog, the owl and the rattler lived together, and the rattler's attack was quick death—a pair of high boots being the only protection.

"Some bad men were worse than the snakes. If you met a stranger and he did not answer your hail, your orders were to shoot to kill! 'Twas too dangerous taking chances with road agents or outlaws.

"AT THE time I speak of, only a few years after the Custer massacre, hostile bands of savages strolled the prairie. Even friendly Indians were liable to go bad if provoked. I vividly remember one thrilling escape on the trip from Yankton, then the end of the railroad at Fort Pierre on the Missouri.

"In a gulch or arroyo, where we had camped for shelter, I was sitting on the mess-box near the cook when a bullet ploughed up the dirt at my feet. My chief dove to the far side of the box, went flat on the ground. 'Injuns!' he cried. I ran for it. The second bullet grazed my hip, but I kept on. He said I ran so fast that my knees were doubled up to my chin, and I don't doubt it. As I found safety behind a wagon the armed men of our party began firing.

"The Indians were posted on high rocks above our position. While half the party defended the ring of barricaded wagons, the others detoured out of camp and, reaching the plateau, attacked and drove away the skulking shooters.

"We attributed the desultory attack to a piece of meanness on the part of one of our men. We had met a band who wanted to trade with us. Our trader charged the chief a dollar for a two-by-two slab of salt pork, and tried to force the Indians to swap good ponies for scurvy stock.

"AT NIGHT in warm weather we slept under the wagons. The horses were corralled within the wagon circle. Cattle were set free on the prairie, but watched by a mounted herder. Naturally, there was a good deal of cattle rustling going on. There were also Indian night attacks to be looked out for.

"Early one morning we came upon a party that had been attacked by Sioux just before dawn. The canvas tops, wagon-bodies, tongues and even spokes were riddled with arrows and bullets. Some of the arrows went so deep in the wood I couldn't pull 'em out. A number of the horses had been slain: others that were terribly wounded we had to put out of their misery.

"Strange to say, none of the Indian fusillade had hit their paleface antagonists, who, from cover, had replied briskly with rifle fire. If the Indians had made a hit, they would have killed certain sure, for their arrows were poisoned. Dipped in rattlesnake venom, the dart that pierced the skin was fatal.

"AT DIFFERENT places on or off the trail were government agencies where travelers sought refuge when the aborigines got on the war path. We were detained at Crow Creek agency a week, waiting for the troubles to be pacified.

"Gracious! Those painted redskins in the Sun Dance were almost as terrifying as in war. The part in their hair was painted red, to look like blood: the faces were lurid, horrible, and the upper bodies of the young braves were mutilated with slits, through which thongs were passed, and to further test their fortitude they were suspended by these buckskin thongs.

"When a boy, the Sioux Indian Rain-in-the-Face, who afterward killed Custer, was suspended for hours by such a thong passed through the pierced flesh behind his shoulder blades.

"THE lure that urged us all on was the gold in the Black Hills. More than two months—from April 14 to June 17—was consumed in the 450-mile trip. By the end of that time we had become straight shooters, fearless bareback riders, clever bullwhackers and efficient rattlesnake killers. We were hardened and we were dirty.

"When finally I washed in a creek, I threw away all the grayback-infested things and clad myself in some duds that Old Man Barnard had given me. He was from Boston and helped me a lot. Nights I used to sleep in the upper bunk of his cabin, and days I divided between working in a restaurant and staking out a claim with a partner. We attacked it with pick and shovel like the others. We were full of hopes of vast fortunes.

"I WAS known to everybody as 'Boston.' The proprietor of the dance hall was called 'Colorado Charley.' Everyone had a nickname. 'Twas a common sight for a mounted cowboy to ride into Utter's, smash a bottle or two off the bar with a bullet, have a drink, pay for it and the little matter of broken crockery and go his way.

"When a real difference of opinion occurred the sequel was a killing. As the result of such an argument, Utter's pal was shot through the back as he sat at a card table in most cowardly fashion.

"This was the headstone I beheld erected over his grave:

WILD BILL
J. B. Hitchcock
Killed by the Assassin
Jack McCall
in August, 1875

GOOD-BYE Pard,—
We'll meet again
in the happy hunting grounds to part
no more.

"A few years later Wild Bill was removed to a cemetery farther up the mountain. After his decease Bill's luxuriant locks had grown considerably longer, as dead men's sometimes will. Charley cut off his pal's hair and wore it as a hat-band around his Stetson. As for the body, it was petrified!

"ONE day a rough fellow came in from the hills with a nugget and when, boy-like, I asked him what it was, he replied indifferently: "Oh, just a piece of brass.' It was really gold and assayed $900. The whole thing was a huge gamble. One man would happen to strike a gold vein perhaps not 15 feet away from others who were toiling and sweating to no purpose.

"Panning from the beds of streams was another way of getting at it. Pop Wilson, an old 'Forty Niner,' using a dry rocker, used to get $15 and $20

in gold-dust a day out of 'tailings' or dirt that others had sieved through and thrown away.

"I had a good claim but left it to the care of a partner when I was obliged to return East. A year later I went back to Deadwood City and figured that I was going to be rich. But my partner, a sporting character, had failed to work the claim, which in the eyes of the law made legal the 'jumping' by anybody that saw fit. In the intervening year two men had jumped our claim, and whatever chance I had of fortune was forever lost.

"DID you ever meet Deadwood Dick?" I asked.

"No," replied Mr. Whitney, "but I had the honor of acquaintance with Calamity Jane. She was a real person. She scouted for the government around the Indian agencies for many years. The circumstances of our meeting were scarcely dignified. She was drinking whisky in a barroom when a bad man accosted her and accused her of being a spy.

"Without arguing, Jane threw her glass of whisky in the man's face, then reached for her gun, and 'beaded' Mr. Bad Man, backing him out of the place at the point of it. 'Now, git!' she said. Calamity Jane always was 'suddint-like,' in that way."

SOMETHING from G. W. Barrington concerning his story in this issue:

Dallas, Texas.

My story may be in need of a little supplemental explanation to those readers of *Adventure* who are not fox hunters. To a fox hunter, the story would be clear, but the editorial adjuration to make a tale clear to every one must be respected. That's where "Camp-Fire" comes in handy.

IN THE first place, a "Walker" hound is a specimen of a breed or strain founded by 'Lige Walker, of Kentucky, and perpetuated to this day by his son, Woods Walker. The original cross was between a purebred English foxhound and an American black-and-tan trailer, which, in turn, probably had English blood, certainly tinctured with that of the old-fashioned blood-hound. Walker produced a dog having the superior trailing ability and speed of the English hound, happily combining with it the courage and stamina of the old American "tanner" hound. The fame of the Kentucky product spread until today the term "Walker" dog is familiar to every huntsman. In fact, the strain so preponderates in the better packs over the country that the name stands as an emblem of everything that is good in a hound.

ANOTHER feature of the story possibly in need of elucidation, is the "negro and respite" method employed, also the fact that nowhere is it stated whose dog caught the fox. Methods of hunting Reynard vary in different sections of the country, but fox-hunters all over the wide world have one trait in common—they make every possible effort to keep the fox from being caught. The gray fox "trees" in wooded sections, and it is the practise there to allow him a breathing spell, then shake him down and renew the chase. For this reason, too, no credit attaches to the performance of a dog which kills, the laurels going to the busy hunter who earns a reputation as a "strike" dog (one able to pick up a cold trail) and also has the ability to straddle that trail and follow it at speed until the furry quarry has been put up a tree or down a hole, if all goes well, or has been caught and killed if he has more courage than discretion.

The fox hunter of the Southwest takes his pleasure largely through his ears, seldom catching sight of pack or game. He is content to sit all night, even in a drizzle or while a skift of snow is falling, just for the blessed privilege of hearing the music and arguing with his neighbor in a chaffing way over the merits and demerits of their respective canines. Night sport of that sort is like olives and celery. The first taste doesn't appeal, but the appetite grows. Go into camp with hunters of this school and you may be certain of one thing: There'll be no sissy-boys or lounge lizards anywhere about. It may appear to be a slow game, but you will find that only he-humans practise it.—G. W. BARRINGTON.

The following explanation from Mr. Barrington wouldn't have been necessary if I hadn't slipped a cog and scheduled two of his stories in the wrong order. I'm sorry.

Dallas, Texas.

It has struck me that perhaps some puzzlement may ensue among the readers because of the fact that this story was written previous to "Mostly by Phone," though published subsequently. Things don't jibe exactly. For instance *Danny* is introduced here as a brand-new official, and in plain words it is stated that it is his first day as an officer. As he already has served in that capacity in the other story, that might cause comment, or, at least, speculation—G. W. BARRINGTON.

A WORD from Douglas Oliver concerning his story in this issue:

Chatham, Ontario, Canada.

It is the story of an army chaplain and is based on fact, mostly. Even the scene in the chateau where *Butch* performs on the young Heinie is drawn from actual life. There were good and bad padres, as you probably know. The *David Layne* of my story was a weakling until he woke up.

I have attempted, incidentally, to give a brief word-picture of "Blighty to the line" and I do not think I have overdone it any.—DOUGLAS OLIVER.

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VICTOR SHAW, Box 958, Ketchikan, Alaska. Territory anywhere on the continent of North America. Questions on mines, mining law, mining methods or practise where and how to prospect, how to outfit; how to make the mine after it is located; how to work it and how to sell it; general geology necessary for miner or prospector, including the precious and base metals and economic minerals such as pitchblende or uranium, gypsum, mica, cryolite, etc. Questions regarding investment or the merits of any particular company are excluded.

C.—Old Songs That Men Have Sung

A department for collecting hitherto unpublished specimens and for answering questions concerning all songs of the out-of-doors that have had sufficient virility to outlast their immediate day; chanteys, "forebitters," ballads —songs of outdoor men—sailors, lumberjacks, soldiers, cowboys, pioneers, rivermen, canal-men, men of the Great Lakes, voyageurs, railroad men, miners, hoboes, plantation hands, etc.—R. W. GORDON, 4 Conant Hall, Cambridge, Mass.

D.—Weapons, Past and Present

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers, ammunition and edged weapons. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district.)

1.—All Shotguns, including foreign and American makes; wing shooting. JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure*.

2.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers, including foreign and American makes. DONEGAN WIGGINS, R. F. D. 3, Lock Box 75, Salem, Ore.

3.—Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1800. Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheel-lock and snaphaunce varieties. LEWIS APPLETON BARKER, 40 University Road, Brookline, Mass.

E.—Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure*. Fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.

F.—Forestry in the United States

ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass. Big-game hunting, guides and equipment; national forests of the Rocky Mountain States. Questions on the policy of the Government regarding game and wild-animal life in the Forests.

G.—Tropical Forestry

WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, Room 423, Fisk Bldg., Broadway at 57th St., New York. Tropical forests and forest products; their economic possibilities; distribution, exploration, etc.

H.—Aviation

LIEUT.-COL. W. G. SCHAUFFLER, JR., 2940 Newark St. N. W., Washington, D. C. Airplanes; airships; aeronautical motors; airways and landing fields; contests; Aero Clubs; insurance; aeronautical laws; licenses; operating data; schools; foreign activities; publications. No questions answered regarding aeronautical stock-promotion companies.

I.—Army Matters, United States and Foreign

FRED. F. FLEISCHER care of *Adventure*. *United States:* Military history, military policy. National Defense Act of 1920. Regulations and matters in general for organized reserves. Army and uniform regulations, infantry drill regulations, field service regulations. Tables of organization. Citizens' military training camps. *Foreign:* Strength and distribution of foreign armies before the war. Uniforms. Strength of foreign armies up to date. History of armies of countries covered by Mr. Fleischer in general "Ask Adventure" section. *General:* Tactical questions on the late war. Detailed information on all operations during the late war from the viewpoint of the German high command. Questions regarding enlisted personnel and officers, except such as are published in Officers' Directory, can not be answered.

J.—American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal

ARTHUR WOODWARD, care of *Adventure*. Customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions.

K.—First Aid on the Trail

CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Falls City, Neb. Medical and surgical emergency care, wounds, injuries, common illnesses, diet, pure water, clothing, insect and snake-bite;

industrial first aid and sanitation for mines, logging camps, ranches and exploring parties as well as for camping trips of all kinds. First-aid outfits. Meeting all health hazards of the outdoor life, arctic, temperate and tropical zones.

L.—Health-Building Outdoors

CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Falls City, Neb. How to get well and how to keep well in the open air, where to go and how to travel. Tropical hygiene. General health-building, safe exercise, right food and habits, with as much adaptation as possible to particular cases.

M.—Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada

R. T. NEWMAN, Box 833, Anaconda, Mont. General-office, especially immigration, work; advertising work, duties of station agent, bill clerk, ticket agent, passenger brakeman and rate clerk. General information.

N.—STANDING INFORMATION

For **Camp-Fire Stations** write J. COX, care *Adventure*.

For general information on **U. S. and its possessions**, write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications. For **U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries**, the Dept. of Com., Wash., D. C.

For the **Philippines, Porto Rico**, and customs receiverships in **Santo Domingo** and **Haiti**, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Wash., D. C.

For **Alaska**, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For **Hawaii**, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also Dept. of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For **Cuba**, Bureau of Information, Dept. of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union for general information on **Latin-American matters** or for specific data. Address L. S. ROWE, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For **R. C. M. P.**, Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For **Canal Zone**, the Panama Canal Com., Wash., D. C.

National **Rifle** Association of America, Brig. Gen. Fred H. Phillips, Jr., Sec'y, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Wash., D. C.

United States **Revolver** Ass'n. W. A. MORRALL, Sec'y-Treas., Hotel Virginia, Columbus, O.

National Parks, how to get there and what to do when there. Address National Park Service, Wash., D. C.

For whereabouts of **Navy men**, Bureau of Navigation, Navy Department, Wash., D. C.

A Summer Camp in Boone Co., Ark.

ELYSIUM in the Ozarks for the outdoor man:

Request:—"I am interested in the purchase of a five-acre tract of unimproved land for a Summer camp, situated in Boone County, Arkansas, fronting White River, famous bass stream that furnishes opportunities for the hunter, the trapper, the canoeist and the pearl-hunter that are scarcely surpassed anywhere. All in timber, mostly oak; no swamps, no overflow, well drained; title perfect; near county roads; all timber, mineral and oil rights go with the land.

Only fifteen miles to Lake Taneycomo, formed by the great dam at Powersite, Mo., which backs up the White River twenty-five miles; twelve miles to Myrtle, railway station; five miles to Groom, inland store and P. O. Healthy region; short and mild winters, cool summers and ample rainfall; soil gravelly loam with clayey subsoil, which is especially desired in fruit-growing. Every acre valuable.

Good hunting, fishing, trapping and pearling. Game: Quail, squirrel, rabbit, duck, turkey. Fish: Channel cat, crappie, bass, eel and perch. Fur: Skunk, 'coon, 'possum, mink, bobcat. Fifty thousand dollars' worth of pearls and hundreds of tons of shells are marketed annually from White River. The heart of the Ozarks and on the celebrated Branson to Cotter Float, finest fishing trip in the country.

The country tributary, of which this property is a part, is broken, timbered, well-watered, more or less rocky.

I would like to know if this information is correct and would also like further information as to the climate in this region and would appreciate any additional facts you may be able to give me."—J. LIDDINGTON, Ithaca, N. Y.

Reply, by Mr. Thompson:—All the land mentioned in your letter is high and rough. I fished and hunted that country long before the power-site dam was built. I was there two years ago, and White River fishing was still good, especially for large and small mouth bass, perch, cat, etc. There is still a supply of the small fur-bearers mentioned such as cat, mink, 'coon, skunk and 'possum. There are quails, doves, squirrels, turkeys, rabbit, ducks in season and some deer.

The bottoms of White River are very small, and they are the only places that flood. The Cotter-to-Branson float was a fine fishing-trip and the scenery in places beautiful. You will find very broken, hilly, timbered country all around with lots of small streams running into White.

The Winters are very short; only about every ten or fifteen years is it severe and then you never have snow but for a day or two at a time. In the gravelly soil that is not too rough to break fruit grows well, especially peaches and apples.

Pearl-fishing is good, but the finest pearling-grounds are still farther east of you, beyond the dam at Bateville. There has been no exaggeration made to you of the pearling industry.

The Summers are nice, and though you have some hot days the nights in the hills are usually cool.

You must not be far from the Missouri line. Would not be surprized if you found a good deal of zinc and lead in those hills.

Am interested in knowing from you what land company is selling the land and at what price. Perhaps I can then tell you more about the land. Will gladly answer any further questions.

The full statement of the sections in this department as given in this issue, is printed only in alternate issues.

Trapping Central Ontario

LEAVE the other fellow's territory alone:

Request:—"1. What would be the best canoe route to Fort Hope on the Albany River from the town Fraser on the railroad in central Ontario?

2. Are there many people living between the Albany and Attawapiskat Rivers?

3. What are some of the big-game and fur animals in Ontario between the Albany and Attawapiskat Rivers?

4. How much would an equipment for two trappers cost?

5. Is there timber land between the Albany and Attawapiskat Rivers; or is it marsh or burned out?"—LEWIS SOATAK, Gregory, S. Dak.

Reply, by Mr. Sangster:—1. Pagwa is the best detraining point for trip to Ft. Hope, going down the Albany.

2. Few people, save Indians and some white trappers, live in this region.

3. Moose, occasional deer. All northern furred animals, but trapping pretty well covered. I would not advise you butting into other trappers' sections; it is a darn poor proposition to do and means trouble.

4. Cost of trapping outfit ranges between $250 and $400 per man, depending on location, size of outfit, etc.

5. The territory you refer to is largely muskeg, small timber—some burned, other green.

Frankly do not tackle trapping in the North unless you have first experience in the methods of trapping here followed. Make it closer to civilization for first year.

When you get something for nothing, don't make the other fellow pay the postage on it.

Weird Chinese Stomach Ballast

NEW Guinea contributes its share:

Request:—"In reply to a recent inquirer for information in regard to Papua in the November 30th, 1923, issue of *Adventure*, I notice a statement—not in your answer, but printed in larger letters over the letter that was replied to—to the effect that '*bêche-de-mer* is the dried flesh of a sea-slug called the trepang,' etc. I do not wish to challenge this statement, but I have been reliably informed from several Chinese friends of mine who are apparently well educated and speak English fluently, that *bêche-de-mer* was from certain parts of a species of shark, the fins in particular, that were dried and cured.

I would like to know which of these two statements is correct. Enclosed please find self-addressed envelop and postage not attached. Should this letter be published in "A. A." section of *Adventure* I would prefer not to have my name and address printed."—K. G. P.

Reply, by Mr. Armit:—*Bêche-de-mer* or trepang is a sea-slug, a type of holothurian, that is found all over the Pacific. Its collection is an important branch of commerce, for the dried slug is regarded as a delicacy by the Chinese, who use the flesh as the basis of many excellent soups and entrées.

There are numerous varieties—tiger-red, prickly-red, black-teat, teat, black, moon, chalk, lolly, etc., —to give them their commercial labels—of trepang, all of which finds a ready sale in the celestial republic.

The slug inhabits the coral reefs, mud flats, sand-banks, etc., and ranges from a few inches in length to over a yard. It is a repulsive object—a sort of worm—and it has the unpleasant habit of ejecting its viscera when dragged from its native element. Its flesh is like jelly, and it can be used as gelatine when the briny odor has been removed.

I hate to differ from your friends, but the foregoing is a brief and general description of the animal. Your Chinese friends have apparently confused trepang with dried shark-fins, which are also a highly prized commodity in Chinese cookery. The Pacific is a happy hunting ground for three weird articles of stomach ballast in China: Birds' nests, shark fins and trepang. All three are collected in various parts of New Guinea.

If you don't want an answer enough to enclose FULL return postage to carry it, you don't want it.

Navigating a Big Artificial Lake

LOOK out for the squalls:

Request:—"I am living on Lake B. M. Hall, made by the Elephant Butte Dam on the Rio Grande River. There are sudden squalls, precipitous banks and long muddy slopes and boggy; and harbors are scarce and water very deep in places. The prevailing winds are north and south.

Now what I want to know is: Can I successfully use a small sailboat for getting about over the lake, which has about two hundred miles of coastline? Please tell me of the kinds of sailboats that might be successful on the lake. Please do not publish my name in magazine."—F. E. P., San Marcial, N. M.

Reply, by Mr. B. Brown:—I believe a sloop-rigged boat of about eighteen-foot length and say four and one-half foot beam, round bottom with good average depth of keel, would answer your purpose. Unless you are skilled in boat-handling, don't carry too much canvas, on account of the squalls. In a lake of that character squalls come off the face of high precipitous banks, without much regard for the direction of the prevailing wind. If you are not used to handling a sailboat, better get a small manual, for example either Knight's "Small-Boat Sailing" or his book entitled "Sailing." Both may be obtained from the Rudder Publishing Co., 9 Murray St., New York. With such instructions and a little common sense you ought to learn to handle a boat without any particular danger to yourself.

Free service, but don't ask us to pay the postage to get it to you.

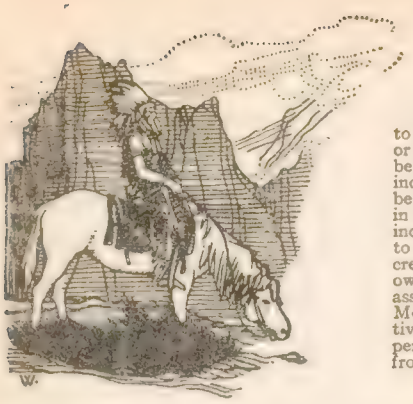
How to Turn Copper Green

WHAT a little of the right kind of acid can do:

Request:—"Can you tell me how I can treat copper so as to give it that greenish look one sees on old copper?"—JAS. CARLETON, Portland, Me.

Reply, by Mr. Victor Shaw:—Apply an acid, such as hydrochloric or nitric. Allow it to stand a bit, then wash it off. It will turn the copper green.

"ASK ADVENTURE" editors are appointed with extreme care. If you can meet our exacting requirements and qualify as an expert on some topic or territory not now covered, we shall be glad to talk matters over with you. Address F. K. NOYES, *Adventure*, New York.



LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

HART, WILLIAM J. A. B. seaman on S.S. *Cuprum*, Seattle to Orient. Would like to hear from you. Made the run, Japan, China and Philippines last winter.—Address R. MCCORMICK, care of St. Helens Inn, Longview, Washington.

ANDERSON OR BURNS. Both Sergeants, Medical Dept., Base Hospital No. 88, Saranay, France, spring of 1919. Drop a line to the 2nd "Looie" if you see this.—Address R. MCCORMICK, care of St. Helens Inn, Longview, Washington.

LARRIMER, NED C. Sergeant 1st class, Medical Dept., Base Hospital No. 58, Hospital Center, Langrus, France. Saw Lampert in Washington, D. C., December, 1921.—Address R. MCCORMICK, care of St. Helens Inn, Longview, Washington.

LOVETT, CHARLES. Seaman. Left his home in Weymouth, Nova Scotia, in 1869. Was seen in Boston, in 1872. Any one knowing anything about him within the past forty years, please write to his brother.—Address JOHN W. LOVETT, 6 Cogswell Ave., Bradford, Mass.

WOULD like to hear from old comrades who served with Bechuanaland African Charter Company Police from 1888 to 1894, before and during the Matabele War, please write.—Address GUSTAV H. SCHOOF, Claresholm, Alberta, Canada.

ARMER, JOHN. Native of Nova Scotia. Mother's name Margaret Pointer. Please write to sister.—Address ROSE REIDY, 118 Sheridan St., Portland, Maine.

BAILEY, DONALD. Nineteen years of age. Last heard from in Pittsburgh, Pa., in February, 1924, as he was about to leave for Detroit. Any information will be appreciated.—Address FREDERICK N. MACLEAN, S.S. *Pawnee*, care of Standard Oil Co. (N. J.), 26 Broadway, New York City.

WHITE, GEORGE. Lorraine and I are broken hearted, please write us. Will send you money to come to Minneapolis. Have job for you.—Address MOTHER.

BONTER, MAX. Worked with me in Rochester Junction, N. Y., April, 1924, and at one time wrote for *Adventure*. Would like to hear from him again.—Address FREDERICK ROY KUBERT, Lehigh Valley, Rochester Junction, N. Y.

BUNCE, WILLIAM J. Thirty-three years of age, five feet six inches tall, light brown hair, brown eyes, fair complexion. Left his home July 24, 1919. Last heard of Nov. 1921, at 502 Western Ave., Toledo, Ohio. Any information will be appreciated by his wife.—Address MRS. WILLIAM J. BUNCE, 1019 West Woodruff Ave., Toledo, Ohio.

KING, JOHN. "Turk." Last heard of on the S.S. *Astral*, bound for China. Works as oiler or fireman. His old bunkie would like to hear from him.—Address GYP MCKINNEY, care of Box 271, Burbank, Calif.

BRADEN, JAMES BLAIN and Robert Andrew. Last heard of in the U. S. Navy. Your uncle would like to hear from you. Also would like to locate your father, Bion C. if still alive.—Address C. E. BRADEN, R. D. 2, Box 16, Leesville, La.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

ERDTMANN, GUSTAVE F. Last heard of twenty-five years ago in Nampa, Ida. Five feet ten inches tall; is now forty-six years of age. Tailor by trade. Any information will be appreciated by his brother.—E. C. ERDTMANN, 327 W. Wheeler St., Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

THE following have been inquired for in either the Dec. 30, 1924 or Jan. 20th, 1925 issues of Adventure. They can get the name and address of the inquirer from this magazine.

ALLISON, MARY; Andersen, Louis; Anderson, Thomas A.; Berry, Lee; Caine, Austin; Challis, Anna; Dealey, Daniel T.; Farr, Goebel; Fellows, J. H. or Jay; Forsythe, Davis Henry; Franz, Frank Futtage; Geibel, J. K.; Grass, Chas.; Gross, Joseph Leo; Holmes, Elmer; Howe, Frank A.; Jackson, James Bangle; Johnson, J. E.; Kay, Thomas Macalpine; Loosley, Earle; Melin, Pete; Merton, Ed; Mockley, J. E.; Morrison, Mrs. Edith; Neilsen, Seibert; Newton, Lucy Caroline; Ragsdale, T. P.; Reed, Mrs. Jack E.; Reilly, Fred W.; Rose or Ruzicka, Charlie; Shannon, Carmody or Fennell; Sharp, John R.; Stewart, Robert; Styring, Howard A.; Tainton, Blain A.; Wesley, R.

MISCELLANEOUS—Billy Boy; Bjelke; Moussier, Alfred Roy, Hollywood, William Allen, any member of Co. F. 7th Reg. U. S. N.; R. D. S.; W. A. S. Would like to hear from any of the boys who were in Co. D, 9th Inf. Second Division.

THE following names have been inquired for within the past two years. The name of the inquirer can be obtained from this magazine.

ADAIR; Adams, Lydia, Lethia and Myrtle (sisters); Adreon, Lloyd; Akers, Ralph P.; Albert, Helen C.; Allan, Albert Victor; Allen, Prescott C.; Adams, Joe; Albert, Louis U.; Anderson, Abel Pontus; Ansell, Edward Clarence T.; Applegate, William F.; Arthur, D. F. Jr.; Arcand, D.; Ashton, George H.; Avelerson, Charles Henry; Atkinson, Finley; Bagby, Oliver Halbert; Bailey, Edgar T.; Baird, Thomas George; Baker, H. W. (Scissorbill); Baker, Halard; Baker, J. C.; Babcock, Charles (Chuck); Barr, Joseph L.; Bartell, O.; Bassett, George; Barr, Joseph L.; Bateman, Leonard; Beach, L. A.; Bedortha, Harry F.; Beames, Joe; Benjamin, James; Bennett, Howard; Berking, Joe; Bernstein, Abe; Berry, C. R.; Beyer, Louis; Bildog, Morgan; Blain, Harold F.; Bowlly, Charles and John; Bowman, Jesse; Boggs, Jack J.; Bradford, Robert and Lewis; Brancher, G. W.; Branson, Hosea L. (Billy); Brassel, John H.; Brennan, Jack; Brown, Carl A.; Brown, Mary; Brothen, Carl or Charley; Brown, Carl; Brockman, C. A.; Brotherton, Gorge Henry; Brunson, Charlie Acel; Buckley, Jim; Burdick, L. H.; Burke, Ray; Burnett, Thos.; Burns, Bob or Ralph Scott; Burrough, Stanley; Bushby, Edward T.; Bussell, Alvia; Byron, William; Campbell, Fred C.; Canfield, Mary and Charles; Caples, Albert; Carver, Bernard R.; Carter, Nick and Chas. Schaub; Cate, William C.; Celentano, D. (Celly); Chapman, Frederick Wilson; Chilsom, Robert; Christian, Olive; Cleland, Herbert; Cloud, Charles; Clarence, Roy P.; Classick, Paul H.; Coghlan, C. C.; Coleman, Anna Mae and Eva Verline; Collins, Chas. or Mack; Cooper, Andrew D.; Cooper, James; Corley, Charles; Cornish, Charles Jr.; Costelloe, Jack; Courtland, Goodwin; Cook, Harvey, Lawrence; Conniston, Art; Connors, Eugene

or Gene (Chuck); Crews, Herman R.; Crispt, Lizzie; Cuddeback, Lavina G.; Culberston, L. Carroll; Curts, Frank E.; Crosby, J. H.; Cunningham, R.; Dakers, C. C.; Daly, Charles; Damon, George B.; Davidson, Alexander; Davis, Andrew Lester; Davis, Lester; Davies, John Kirker; Day, George E.; Davis, Lillian; De Foe, Clarence; Delmas, Nick; De Valle, Louis; Devere, Raymond; Dean, Mamie; Dickson, Ted Jr.; Dillmore, Jack; Dickens, Allan; Dohal, Frank; Donahue, Thomas F; Douglas, Wallace; Drake, Elmer (also known as Stanley Drake); Drewes, Harold V. (Tex); Drinkard, Emary P.; Duckworth, John; Dunn, Paul A.; Dunston, Arnold; Durning, Frank L.; Eberhardt, Sarah and Virginia; Ebery, Gordon; Economu, August; Edens, Fred Clark; Edwards, Thomas; Elam, Richard; Ellis, Walter S.; Eadon, Lionel Alfred; Eams, Ralph; Edmund, K. B.; Ennis, Henry; Estee, L. B.; Evans, James Booth; Faries, Cecil R.; Fessenden, Robert; Fanning, Denitt; Finn, Huck; Fleisch, Florence; Forde, Joseph Patrick; Forman, J. B.; Frazer, John George; French, Dwight; Fuller, Charles; Fuller, W. J.; Fulton, Frank; Furtodo, Mary; Gardner, Charles H.; Garlick, Clyde W.; Garnier, Martin; Garrabrandt, Anna B.; Gaffney, J. E. (Red); Gerrarde, A. C.; Gevert, Richard; Gilday, John E.; Gildwell, R. R.; Gillam, Catholine; Gistason, Jacob; Gibbs, William H.; Gordon, Frank; Goss, Willie; Grady, Nellie, Mrs. (née Nellie McCarthy); Graham, L. B.; Grant, Earl L.; Grant, L. S.; Grasme, Erwin; Graves, James Franklin; Gray, Harry; Greene, Cecil; Green, C. O.; Green, John; Griffith, Arthur Frederick or William; Gwilliam, John Lodge; Haigh, Ward Percy; Hagen, August; Hamilton, G. A.; Haney, Lillian and Jack; Hankins, O. D.; Hanks, Marion R.; Hannigan, Pat.; Hansen, Anders; Harding, Samuel Merton or A. C. Ardell; Hargus, Claude; Hart, Allan J.; Hart, David William; Hart, Henry S.; Hankey, Edward A.; Haynie, Thomas Sexton; Hay, Edward William C.; Henderson, Helen; Hennessy, J. M.; Hennon, Ralph (Bud); Herbert, Frank; Henry, James; Hicks, Ester; Hidinger, Leonard L.; Hillerby, Robert J.; Hines, Hugh W.; Hirtle, Reginald; Hoffman, William; Hogan, R. M.; Hollis, Clarence C.; Holland, James Arthur; Hollman, Harry and Krough, John; Holloway, Hemer M.; Holly, A. J.; Holly Geo. or Joe; Hooker, Lynn and Jake Archer; Howe, Charles; Howell, James Edgar; Hoste, Hickman; Huff, Ray or sister Vera; Hubbard, William Augustus; Jackson, Jack H.; Jennings, Joe; Johnson, Bill; Johnson, Dercy and William; Johnson, O. W.; Johnson, Theodore (Toady); Johnson, Walter and Durcy; Johnston, Robert Gordon; Kane, Thomas Edward; Kane, Thomas C.; Kavash, Samuel; Karelle, Lieut. L. B. U. S. N.; Keith, Henry; Kelly, John H.; Kenny, Albert; Kephart, Steve John, Peter; Key, Maggie; Knight, John; Killian, Gustave; Kirsch, Michael; Koyoto, Whitey; Kretoslar, Jerry; Krone, Joseph; Kubik, Charles J.; Lamb, Frank; Lambert, Edwin; Lane, James A.; Langshaw, Robert Henry; Lantis, Wesley; Larsen, George Waldo; Latchford, Ed; Lawrence, Joseph Simon; Larrett, Henry, Landahl, Harry; LaPar, Jean; Leask, Thomas; Leider, Joseph; LeMire, Martha, Mrs.; LeRouge, Harry; Leuzkee, Gottlieb Fritz; Levine, Dave; Lewis, Arthur C.; Lewis, Oscar; Lindsay, Willard C.; Lindsey, Percy; Lipesey, Alex; Little, Mary Ann Weston; Little, Thomas; Locke, Charles E.; Long, Leonard C.; Loomis, Albert B.; Lusk, John; Luther, Robert; Lyman, Robert; Lysoe, Meta M.; McCarthy, R. N.; McCallister, Wm. R.; McCoy, W. C.; McKay, Earl; McCurley, T. J.; McCutcheon, Ernest; McDonald, Mrs. Anna; McFee or Goddier; McGee, Martin; McGovern, James and Joseph; McGovern, Thomas P.; McGuire, Benjamin; McDermott, Dr. Gordon; McDonald, James; McKelberg, A. J.; McElligott, Eva Margory; McDonald, Robert; McNamee, Joseph T.; McManus, Roderick P.; McNally, Patrick and Joe (brothers); McNamara, William or William Thomas; McPherson, Norman; McRae, Norman N.; McRobert, Charles; McWilliams, Walter; MacDonald, Malcolm, Mrs.; Mack, Joseph F.; Mackeys or Mackie, Louis; Malone, Clifford; Maloney, Roger O. Mills; Mann, Herbert Jr.; Manning, Wilard; MacDonald, Fred B. (Bozo); Martin, Henry and Emma; Martin, Nate; Martin, Neely; Mattson, John H.; Mauck, Joseph B.; Maule, Harry Almeroco; May, C. B.; May, Mattie Marie; May, William Sullivan; Mayle, Harold B.; Matthew, Harry Robbins; Mayo, Benjamin; Matthews, James Andrew; Meadows, Madge (or Marguerite Munro); Meyers, S. J.; Miller, Mr.; Miller, Charles; Miller, Floyd Chester; Mitchell, Bob; Mitchell, Etta; Mitchell, Dr. Gordon; Moore, Robert (Bob); Morgan, John; Morgan, Newton A.; Morgan, Walter V.; Moore, Anna; Moughan, Patrick; Muller, E.; Murdaugh, Roy H.; Murphy, Esmond R.; Murray, Richard H.; Murrays, James; Murphy, George; Napier, Harry; Navarro, Nedra; Nekring, Frederick; Newton, Lucy Caroline, Miss and father; Noll, Frank; Nordahl, Thomas; Norton, Walter (Prof.); Noble, William Nathan; O'Connor, John; O'Connor, Stephen; O Dell, Ancil; O'Donnell, Michael C.; Ogg, John; Olson, Lawrence T.; Odell, Wm. E.; O'Neil, Arthur; O'Rourke, Edward; O'Rourke, John; Orvin, W.; Otterson, Thomas James; Paxtno, Christer H.; Parrish, Harry; Perry, Robert R.; Plint, Mary; Porter, Edward Beck; Powell, Jesse; Phillips, Fred Dillard; Plumtree, Arthur Sawyer; Price, James; Prichard, "Zark" or Walter; Priest, Francis or Julia Priest; Pruitt, John and Roy; Puzar, Julius; Prince, Geo. X.; Rahilly, Richard H.; Rahmer, William; Raymond, Fred; Reed, Claude; Reed, Tiffin; Reger, Andrew (Emdre); Renner, Walter J.; Renz, Carrie; Reynolds, "Diamond Joe" (John); Reed, Claud; Richards, Charles; Richards, Olsen; Richards, Frank; Riley, Charley; Roberts, George L.; Rodgers, Clifford Grant; Rodgers (Rogotzky) Theodore; Rogers, Bob; Rogers, Ellis; Rost, John S.; Roycroft, Loyd C.; Rojewski, Teddy; Rucker, C. Ryan; Russell, Robert Lawrence; Ryan James A.; Sailor, Bob; "Sake," Evan J.; Samuel, Merton H.; Saxton, Samuel, Hugh, Joshua and Thomas; Sands, Mrs. Alice N.; Sands, Gordon L.; Schaffer, Gabriel; Schecter, S. M.; Sciarra, Ben F.; Scott, R. E. or Estill; Sharpe, Cecil; Seaton, James Arthur; Seney, A.; Sheehan, Marvin; Sharpe, Lester E.; Shepard, Harold North; Shmoll, Edward;

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

Semple, James Lithow; Sidel, Al.; Corp. Norman L. Simpson; Siple, William B.; Skinner, James H.; Sliwinski, Stanley J.; Sly, George; Smith, Charles; Smith, Lester M. Ex. Sgt. U. S. M. C.; Smythe, Arnold; Smits, Fred H.; Snowden, E.; Sorrel, Robert; Southwick, Alfred Whales; Sowden, Francis; Spencer, Bert; Scanlon, Oliver J.; Spencer, Raymond; Spies, Chas. W.; Spinks, John L.; Stafford, George; Stassi, John; Steel, William; Steigerwald, Charles F.; Stevenson, I. J.; Stringfellow, Harry and Jesse; Sprecker, L. W.; Swauick, John Joseph; Swiatkowski, William J.; Swenson, Rosie; Tankersley or Tankushy, Isaac; Tate, Thomas; Tereume, Auguste; Thompson, Charles; Thorp, William; Thompson, Myron and Lawrence; Tillman, Albert; Tomlin, Bradley; Trainor, Owen P; Trask, Willard; Tomb, William; Ubil, George Durbo; Uhl, James (Red); Ureta, Paul Morales; Vanderbeck, Andrew W.; Vanderpool, Martha, Elizabeth, Nancy, Christie, Mary Willis, Joe and Johnnie; Van Dyke, Peter; Van Marter, Frank E.; Verney, Joe; Via, Dellman H.; Vincent, Ted; Vitie, Alexander M.; Wagoner, Harry R.; Walsh, Matthew J.; Walton, Kenneth; Wammack, Ray; Watkins, Thomas; Welson, Charles; White, Chester Allen; Whitefoot, Jack; Whitmore, I. W.; Wikstrom, Ralph Ronald Ludwig; Wilderman, Arthur; Williams, Grant B.; Williams, Joe; Willis, Frank; Wilson, George; Wilson, Edgar Pvt.; Williams, Chales H.; Wilcox, Arthur M.; Williams, Miss (Red Cross Nurse); Wirt, G. William; Wolff, Chris; Wonderly, George W.; Wood, Carl Herbert; Wood, Elmer; Wood, Theodore; Womble, Benjamin Franklin; Woodruff, Mary L.; Woodward, Lee R.; Woolery or Wickwire Family; Wortley, J. R.; Wojeik, Mrs. Catherine Schilling; Wynne, Herbert; Young, Joy; Younglove, J. W.; Zitman, Eddie and Joe Foley.

Please notify us at once when you have found your name.

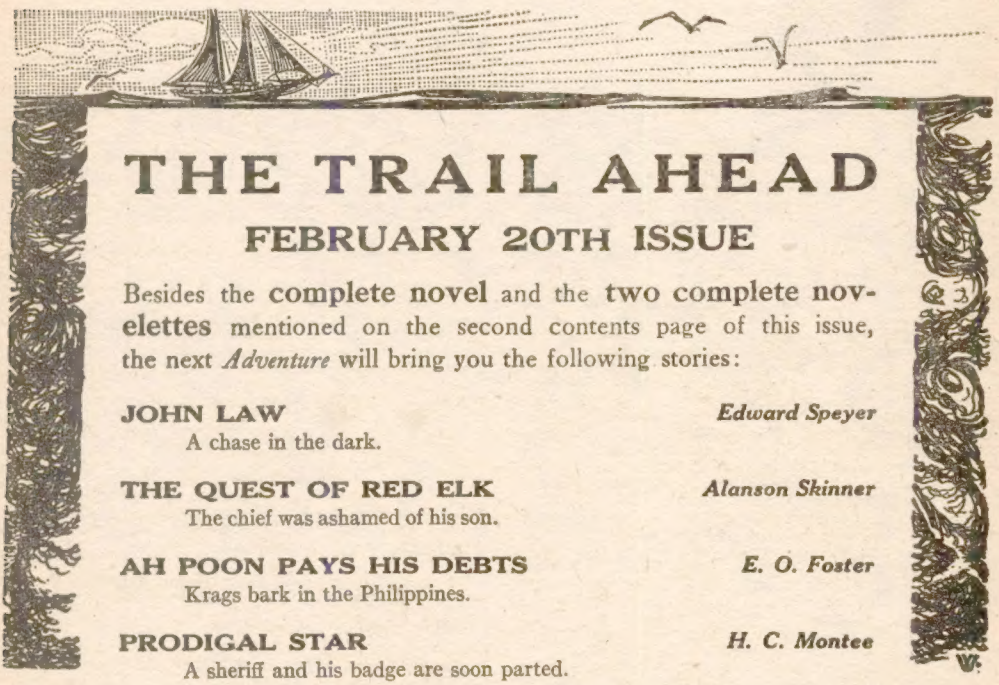
MISCELLANEOUS: C. L. W of Ft. Clayton, Panama; "Shun" Duke Shelton, Victor Alvin, Moe Henery Devlin (97) Kelley, Lynch (Honolulu) fall out and report W. A. B.; Will all men who served overseas with 4th Canadian Infantry Battalion please send names and addresses to Capt. W. L. Gibson, 50 James St., South Hamilton, Ont.; W. V. M.; Boster brothers; Helen H.; Howard; Peter Joe; Shannon, Naylor, Lettow, Davis, Lewis, Dunn, Pratt, Emmes and other; Bovs of Troop "G" and 7th Cavalry; D. B. K.; Members of 51st Aero Squadron Mineola; Would like to hear from the old-timers that hit the trails up the Republican River or Platte or Old Missouri Rivers, up Fort Bend; Would like to hear from any of the members of Hope of Gloster Lodge, No. M. 195 and Rokes Drift Lodge, No. M.181, I. O. G. T. that met at the Soldiers Home on Canton Road Tien Tsin N. China in 1914; C. B. Geo.; Daddy we want to hear from you. Diana and Jackie boy; "Leary," "Dutch" Rhyne, Kirk, "Tug" Wilson, Haines and all the rest of the gang who graduated from U. S. Navy Yeoman School, Newport, Rhode Island, Dec. 23, 1916; Would like to hear from comrades who served in Troop B, 12th Cavalry from 1901 to 1903; J. C. S.; L. W.; Conger, "Yank" Harris, Locke or any A.B.'s of "Buckeye State;" Texas, Jack, Slushy, Andy O'Brien, Kelly, Ted Leeds, Mike or any of the crew of the Bowhead Whaling Schooner "Era;" E. N. T. G.; Fellow shipmates and gobs who were in Barracks 948 East Company 670, Regiment 9, in Camp Farragut, Great Lakes, Ill., during January 1919 or in the Gunners Mate School, Barracks C. Company A. Regiment 11, Main Station Great Lakes Naval Training Station, Great Lakes Ill. during Feb. and March, 1919 or in Unit 17 North U. S. Naval Hospital, Great Lakes, Ill. during April, 1919 are asked to write to a disabled gob; Would be pleased to bear from any one in the Zipperien family; J. W. H. Jack; Charles; C. B.; Ek.; Honey; Tom—Celeste needs operation; W. N. S.;

Manlove family; Relatives of Hazel Chreiman; Z. T. H.; Ike; Would be glad to hear from any of the boys who soldiered with me in Co. K., U. S. Infantry during war; V. M. Tex.; Cox C. O. M.; Will the man who was our guest in Cherokee County, Texas in March, 1923 and who claimed to be one of the Dalton brothers please correspond and reach for the latch-spring when passing this way; Would like to hear from Camp-Fire members; Jack, please send for Beaty as soon as possible. Have sold everything; Dave or "Sandy;" Carl P. or Laurence Earl M.; Loyd; C. F. E.; Joe; Women members of Camp-Fire write to me; Els; Buck; Burke; U. S. S. Chicago members of her crew from April 6, 1917 while in "Rio" and South American ports; Case family; Chuck, Harris, Ikwabbe, Slim Hawkens, Big Clamence, Wild Bill Cody, Ed Larson, Tex Farrel, Kid Reynolds, Charles Warrant, Gus Hughes, Jean Stuarett, Short Murrey, Ed Rice of Dallas, Texas, Jack Kennedy; Company "M" 23rd Infantry; De Vresse; Ewart; Would like to hear from any of the boys of Battery A, 2nd U. S. Field Artillery; Hall, Hill and Valentine; F. P. H.; Herrington, Ernest Chester, Joseph Forest, Roy Ray, and Philip Maitland; Hughie; Lester; Lambert; Wanted to hear from any one who went to France in Third Detachment of labor foreman; "Monte" or Hassayampa;" Jack Passfield, Charlie Farnham, Sam Pyle; "Snake Eye Scotty;" Brother and two sisters; Troop K. Fifth Cavalry, Members Petry, Kelly, Thompson, G. O. or any others that were in Mexico in 1919; William "Coffeebeans."

UNCLAIMED MANUSCRIPTS

ASHBY, George; Danziger, Adolphe; Denk, Ernest; Duncan, D. S.; Duplanti, Izora; Horn, Charles; McDonald, Richard H.; Pryal, Charles D.; Reid, Allan; Spaulding, E. L.; Tell, William; Trannack, C. V.

MISCELLANEOUS: J.M.C.



THE TRAIL AHEAD

FEBRUARY 20TH ISSUE

Besides the **complete novel** and the **two complete novelettes** mentioned on the second contents page of this issue, the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

JOHN LAW — *Edward Speyer*
A chase in the dark.

THE QUEST OF RED ELK — *Alanson Skinner*
The chief was ashamed of his son.

AH POON PAYS HIS DEBTS — *E. O. Foster*
Krags bark in the Philippines.

PRODIGAL STAR — *H. C. Montee*
A sheriff and his badge are soon parted.

MOUNTAINS OF MYSTERY A Four-Part Story Part III — *Arthur O. Friel*
The *blondos* are found at last!

HEROES OF THE SQUARE X RANCH — *Thomas Topham*
One of them smacked a bear in the face.

Still Farther Ahead

THE three issues following the next will contain *long* stories by Harold Lamb, Hugh Pendexter, Leslie McFarlane, John Dorman, Thomson Burtis, Larry Barretto, Arthur D. Howden Smith, James Parker Eldredge, Sidney Herschel Small and Frederick Moore; and short stories by Barry Scobee, T. Samson Miller, Walter J. Coburn, Douglas Oliver, Ralph R. Perry, G. W. Barrington, L. Paul, Thomas Topham, Alan La May, Ernest Lyons, John Webb, Michael J. Phillips, John Webb and others; stories of trappers in the Canadian snow country, sailors off the Florida coast, explorers in Lapland, concession hunters in Africa, vikings in Norwegian fjords, aviators in the oil country, bushlopers in the border colonies, doughboys on the Western Front, traders in the South Seas, vagabonds in Japan, cowboys on the Western range.

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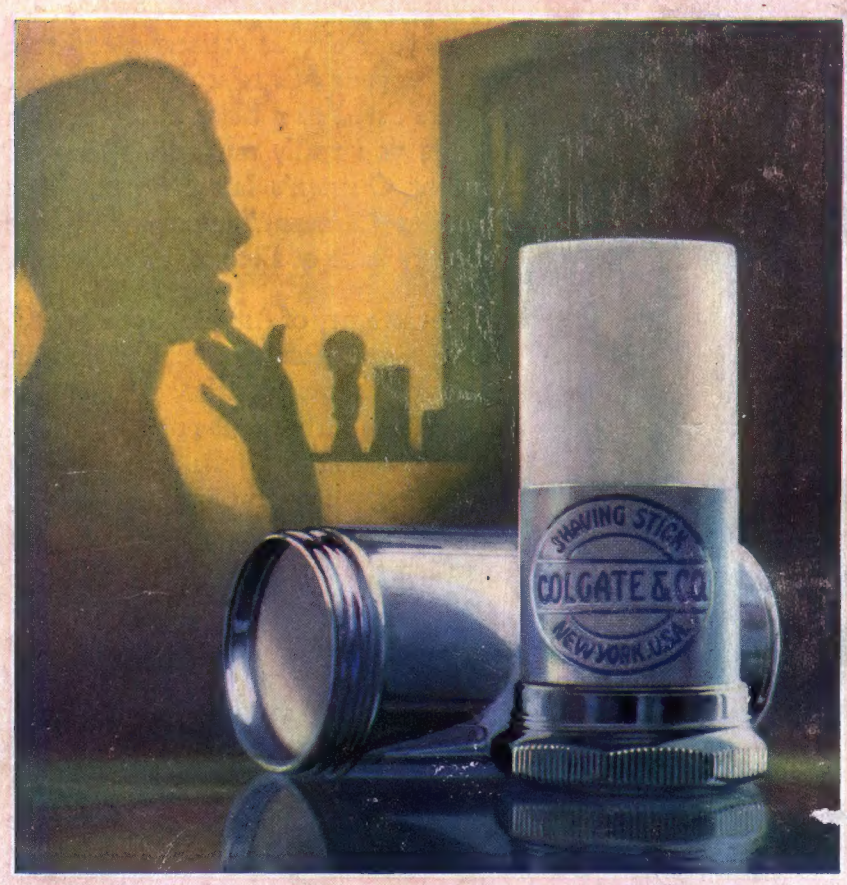

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